

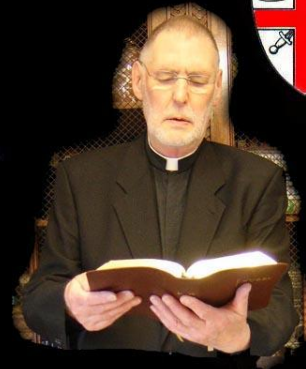


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**Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet
and a light unto my path.
Psalm 119: 105**



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Evangelical House Churches

Berea Bible Handbook – Part Eighteen 1 and 2 Peter, 1, 2, 3 John and Jude

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The Statue of the Apostle Peter at Capernaum the centre of Jesus' activity in Galilee. It was also the home town of the apostles Peter, James, Andrew and

John, and the tax collector Matthew. For much of his adult life, Jesus resided in the small fishing village of Capernaum on the Sea of Galilee. It was here during the infancy of early Christianity that he began his ministry in the town synagogue (Mark 1:21), recruited his first disciples (Mark 1:16–20) and became renowned for his power to heal the sick and infirm (Mark 3:1–5).

Capharnaum, or Capernaum, or Kfar Nahum in Hebrew, is located on the northwest shore of the Sea of Galilee. The original Semitic name Kefar Nahum is known from a Byzantine inscription found in the synagogue of Hammat-Gader.

Early travellers to the site had long recognized the beautifully preserved remains of the ancient synagogue that many believe marked the site, if not the actual building, of Jesus' earliest teaching. But an important detail of how Christianity began still remained: Where in the town had Jesus actually lived? Where was the house of Peter, which the Bible suggests was the home of Jesus in Capernaum (Matthew 8:14–16)?

Italian excavators working in Capernaum may have actually uncovered the remnants of the humble house of Peter that Jesus called home while in Capernaum. (This house of Peter was one of the first Biblical archaeology discoveries reported in **BAR** more than 25 years ago.)

Buried beneath the remains of an octagonal Byzantine martyrium church, excavators found the ruins of a rather mundane dwelling dating to the first century B.C.

Although slightly larger than most, the house was simple, with coarse walls and a roof of earth and straw. Like most early Roman-period houses, it consisted of a few small rooms clustered around two open courtyards. Despite later proving to be one of the most exciting Biblical archaeology discoveries, the house appeared quite ordinary. According to the excavators, however, it is what happened to the house after the middle of the first century A.D. that marked it as exceptional and most likely the house of Peter, the home of Jesus in Capernaum.

In the years immediately following Jesus' death, the function of the house changed dramatically. The house's main room was completely plastered over from floor to ceiling—a rarity for houses of the day. At about the same time, the house's pottery, which had previously been household cooking pots and bowls, now consisted entirely of large storage jars and oil lamps. Such radical alterations indicate that the house no longer functioned as a residence but

instead had become a place for communal gatherings, possibly even the first Christian gatherings, a key factor in how Christianity began. As with many Biblical archaeology discoveries, often the small details most convincingly tie ancient material remains to Biblical events and characters.

For instance, the excavators found that during the ensuing centuries, the plastered room from the original house had been renovated and converted into the central hall of a rudimentary church. The room's old stone walls were buttressed by a newly built two-story arch that, in turn, supported a new stone roof. The room was even re-plastered and painted over with floral and geometric designs of various colours.

The building's key role in understanding how Christianity began was confirmed by more than a hundred graffiti scratched into the church's walls. Most of the inscriptions say things like "Lord Jesus Christ help thy servant" or "Christ have mercy." They are written in Greek, Syriac or Hebrew and are sometimes accompanied by etchings of small crosses or, in one case, a boat. The excavators claim that the name of Peter is mentioned in several graffiti, although many scholars now dispute these readings.

This simple church building, helpful in determining how Christianity began, survived for more than 300 years before it was finally replaced in the fifth century by a well-built octagonal martyrium church. Octagonal martyria were built to commemorate an important site, such as the original house of Peter that once stood here. The inner sanctum of the octagonal building was built directly above the remains of the very room of the first-century house that had formed the central hall of the earlier church.

Biblical archaeology discoveries are not cut-and-dry cases. Though there is no definitive proof in this instance that the house ruin uncovered by the excavators actually is the ancient house of Peter, there is layer upon layer of circumstantial evidence to support its importance in early Christianity and its association with Jesus in Capernaum and his foremost disciple, Peter. Were it not for its association with Jesus and Peter, why else would a run-of-the-mill first-century house in Capernaum have become a focal point of Christian worship and identity for centuries to come?

The Man Peter, Apostle

Peter was the name given by Jesus to Simon Bar-Jona the Galilean fisherman, one of the first of the twelve chosen disciples. The Greek word *petra* means "rock" and the Aramaic equivalent is "Cephas." Peter and Andrew his brother came from Bethsaida, a fishing village on the Sea of Galilee. Simon Peter was a leader of twelve, and part of the inner circle--Peter, James, and John. He was with Jesus in Capernaum, at the house of Jairus the ruler of the synagogue, on the mountain during the Transfiguration and at Gethsemane. Peter hailed Jesus as the Christ at Caesarea Philippi, but denied his master three times in the courtyard of the high priest.

After Jesus' ascension Peter preached on Pentecost and healed in the Temple. Peter later saw a vision in which a sheet full of animals descended from heaven, which made him realize that people of every nation who fear God and do what is right are acceptable to God (Acts 10). He received the gentile Cornelius as a Christian and was instrumental in persuading the Jerusalem council to receive gentiles into the church without circumcision.

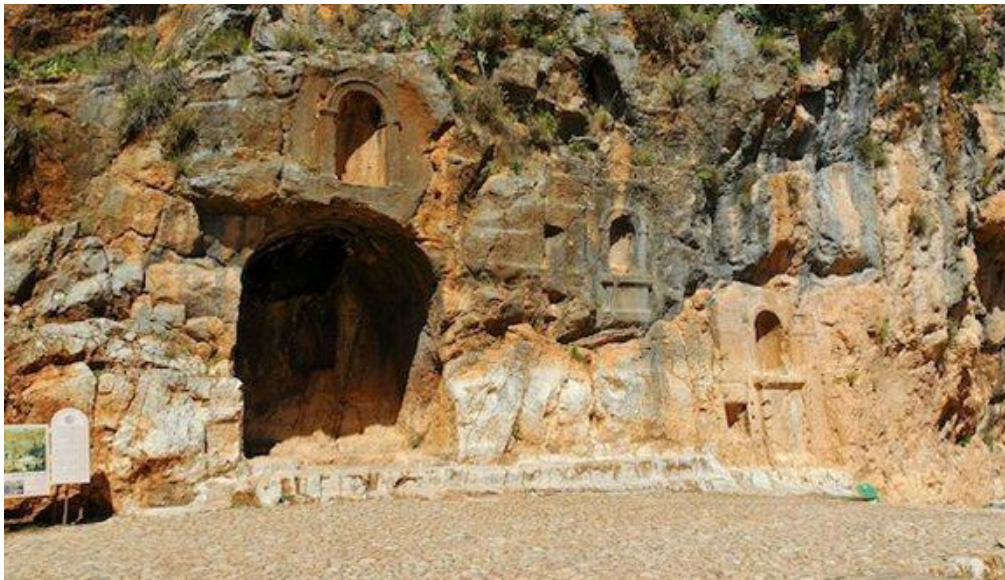
Mark 1:16-17 - Call

Mark 8:27-30 - Confession

Mark 14:66-72 - Denial

Acts 2:14-36 - Pentecost sermon

Acts 10:1-43 – Vision



At Caesarea Philippi (Baniyas) - Niche where the god Pan was venerated and later where the apostle Peter preached the Gospel of salvation through Christ.

As soon as the truth came out at Caesarea Philippi that Jesus was the Messiah, the Lord made clear the unpleasant implications for his followers. When Jews thought of the Messiah in the first century, they thought of God's anointed, David, gloriously triumphing over the Philistines and just about everyone else. They thought about the peace and prosperity of the empire ruled by Solomon.

Jesus knew that the end of the story would be even more glorious than this—eternal life in the Kingdom of Heaven. But he also knew that the way to such triumph was the way of the cross, and that anyone who wanted to be his disciple needed to follow him on this *Via Dolorosa*.

Jesus had just named him “prime minister” by calling him “the rock” and giving him the keys. So Peter felt it entirely his place to pull the king aside and advise him to take a different road. As he had been praised by the Master, now he is rebuked. Jesus goes so far as to say to him, “Devil get behind me!” That’s a far cry from “the Rock!”

Some have pointed to this as proof that Peter, and his papal successors, are not infallible as Catholics claim. But actually, this illustrates well what the Catholic Church teaches about the subject. For Catholic doctrine does not proclaim that the pope can never make a mistake in personal judgment. It is only when he fully engages his authority as successor of Peter speaking from Peter’s seat of authority (“*ex cathedra*”) that the Church guarantees him to be acting under the charism of truth given by the Father through the Spirit. When Peter publicly proclaimed “you are the Christ,” Jesus pointed out that this was not from him, but from the Father. When Peter privately said, “God forbid that you should suffer,” Jesus notes that the source of this was himself. And what’s worse, this human opinion was being used by a diabolic manipulator to tempt the Lord to choose comfort and honour over suffering and sacrifice.

Jesus will have none of it, of course. After all, He is the truth incarnate. And the truth is that glory comes only after sacrifice. And His own incomparable sacrifice will not make things easy for his disciples, but will blaze the trail of sacrifice that they too must walk. The sacrifice that he will offer will be Himself. The sacrifice they will be called to offer will be similar: “offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, your spiritual worship.” (Romans 12:1-2).

Peter couldn’t quite get it. None of them could. This is entirely understandable. That is why Jesus had to rebuke with such intensity as to say, “Devil get behind me!” During the ministry of Jesus the apostles here and there experienced a passing inspiration from the Holy Spirit, but that Creator Spirit had not yet taken

up residence within them. That only came when the fire descended on them in the upper room. Before Pentecost, they ran from suffering. After Pentecost they run towards it. Peter, who denied Jesus, ultimately gave his life for him. A successor of Peter, John Paul II, preached his most eloquent sermon by continuing to serve in the twilight years of his life, a living witness of loving self-giving which is a fruit of Pentecost.

Salvation is a free gift of grace, but it will cost you everything. When faithfulness to Jesus brings ridicule rather than applause, don't complain like Jeremiah. Jesus makes clear the cost of discipleship up front. But he also reminds us that the pearl of great price is worth anything we have to pay for it.

The House of Cornelius (Acts 10)¹



² In Caesarea there lived a Roman army officer named Cornelius, who was a captain of the Italian Regiment. He was a devout, God-fearing man, as was everyone in his household. He gave generously to the poor and prayed regularly to God. One afternoon about three o'clock, he had a vision in which he saw an angel of God coming toward him. "Cornelius!" the angel said. Cornelius stared at him in terror. "What is it, sir?" he asked the angel. And the angel replied, "Your prayers and gifts to the poor have been received by God as an offering! Now send some men to Joppa, and summon a man named Simon Peter. He is staying with Simon, a tanner who lives near the seashore."

¹ Retold in everyday language.

² At Caesarea: (*Above picture*) Quotations from KJV 1611.

23: Then called he them in, and lodged them. And on the morrow Peter went away with them, and certain brethren from Joppa accompanied him.

24: And the morrow after they entered into Caesarea. And Cornelius waited for them, and had called together his kinsmen and near friends.

25: And as Peter was coming in, Cornelius met him, and fell down at his feet, and worshipped him.

26: But Peter took him up, saying, Stand up; I myself also am a man.

As soon as the angel was gone, Cornelius called two of his household servants and a devout soldier, one of his personal attendants. He told them what had happened and sent them off to Joppa. Peter Visits Cornelius. The next day as Cornelius's messengers were nearing the town, Peter went up on the flat roof to pray. It was about noon, and he was hungry. But while a meal was being prepared, he fell into a trance. He saw the sky open, and something like a large sheet was let down by its four corners. In the sheet were all sorts of animals, reptiles, and birds. Then a voice said to him, "Get up, Peter; kill and eat them." "No, Lord," Peter declared. "I have never eaten anything that our Jewish laws have declared impure and unclean." But the voice spoke again: "Do not call something unclean if God has made it clean." The same vision was repeated three times. Then the sheet was suddenly pulled up to heaven. Peter was very perplexed. What could the vision mean? Just then the men sent by Cornelius found Simon's house. Standing outside the gate, they asked if a man named Simon Peter was staying there. Meanwhile, as Peter was puzzling over the vision, the Holy Spirit said to him, "Three men have come looking for you. Get up, go downstairs, and go with them without hesitation. Don't worry, for I have sent them." So Peter went down and said, "I'm the man you are looking for. Why have you come?" They said, "We were sent by Cornelius, a Roman officer. He is a devout and God-fearing man, well respected by all the Jews. A holy angel instructed him to summon you to his house so that he can hear your message." So Peter invited the men to stay for the night. The next day he went with them, accompanied by some of the brothers from Joppa. They arrived in Caesarea the following day. Cornelius was waiting for them and had called together his relatives and close friends. As Peter entered his home, Cornelius fell at his feet and worshiped him. But Peter pulled him up and said, "Stand up! I'm a human being just like you!" So they talked together and went inside, where many others were assembled. Peter told them, "You know it is against our laws for a Jewish man to enter a Gentile home like this or to associate with you. But God has shown me that I should no longer think of anyone as impure or unclean. So I came without objection as soon as I was sent for. Now tell me why you sent for me." Cornelius replied, "Four days ago I was praying in my house about this same time, three o'clock in the afternoon. Suddenly, a man in dazzling clothes was standing in front of me. He told me, 'Cornelius, your prayer has been heard, and your gifts to the poor have been noticed by God! Now send messengers to Joppa, and summon a man named Simon Peter. He is staying in the home of Simon, a tanner who lives near the seashore.' So I sent for you at once, and it was good of you to come. Now we are all here, waiting before God to hear the message the Lord has given you." The Gentiles Hear the Good News ,then Peter replied, "I see very clearly that God shows no favoritism. In every nation he accepts those who fear him and do what is right. This is the message of Good News for the people of Israel—that there is peace with God through Jesus

Christ, who is Lord of all. You know what happened throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee, after John began preaching his message of baptism. And you know that God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. Then Jesus went around doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. “And we apostles are witnesses of all he did throughout Judea and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a cross, but God raised him to life on the third day. Then God allowed him to appear, not to the general public, but to us whom God had chosen in advance to be his witnesses. We were those who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. And he ordered us to preach everywhere and to testify that Jesus is the one appointed by God to be the judge of all—the living and the dead. He is the one all the prophets testified about, saying that everyone who believes in him will have their sins forgiven through his name.”

Peter’s Openness

Acts 9:32-11:18

The gospel, to this point, had been preached to Jews, Samaritans, and at least one Jewish proselyte (the Ethiopian treasurer); however, Gentiles had not yet received the Good News of Jesus. As we observed last week, Paul would become the great apostle to the Gentiles, but God opened the gospel door to the nations through the ministry of Simon Peter. The conversion of Cornelius marks a critical turning point in Acts. The apostles continued to preach to the House of Israel, but, increasingly, the harvest came from among non-Jews (note the pattern of Paul’s missionary journeys—often preached first in the synagogues and later to the Gentiles).

There are four conclusions to be formed

1. “We learn here that the gospel is intended for all people. It follows then, that if God wants all people to hear, it is our duty to get it to them.”
2. “We learn that Christian fellowship transcends all racial, social, and cultural differences. Those whom God receives, we should receive.”
3. “We learn that the careful observance of religious duties is not enough to save one. Cornelius, who prayed to God regularly and gave alms to the poor, was instructed to send for Peter who would declare to him words, ‘whereby thou shalt be saved’ (11:14).
4. “We learn that when people act on the light which God has given, they may expect God to give them more light.”

Peter's labours

Peter's Labours in Lydda and Joppa (9:32-43): These concluding verses of Chapter Nine act as an introduction to the conversion of Cornelius and the spread of the gospel to the Gentiles. Following the general route of Philip's earlier labours (See, Acts 8:40) Peter preached the gospel along the Mediterranean coast.

- A. The healing of Aeneas (vv. 32-35): After Saul's Jerusalem visit, Peter travelled to the city of Lydda, about twenty-three miles northeast of Jerusalem. Perhaps Peter intended to visit the dispersed Christians who had left Jerusalem in the aftermath of Stephen's murder; or, maybe he wanted to encourage new converts who came to Christ as a result of the ministry of Philip. Among the believers, Peter found an infirmed man named Aeneas, paralyzed for eight years. In the name of Jesus, Peter healed this man, and many people came to the Lord in the wake of this miraculous event.
- B. The raising of Tabitha (vv. 36-43): While Peter worked in Lydda, disciples in Joppa alerted the apostle that a woman named Tabitha ("Dorcas" in Greek) had grown ill and died. Friends prepared the woman's body for burial and placed her corpse in an upper room. When Peter arrived, he asked the mourners to leave, and he prayed for Tabitha. She arose, by the power of God, and many came to Christ as a result of this miracle. The text indicates that Peter stayed in Joppa for some time, and he boarded in the home of Simon the tanner. Tanners, because of their handling of animal hides, were regarded as unclean; indeed, Vaughan points out that Jewish culture regarded this occupation as grounds for divorce! Some think Peter's willingness to reside with a tanner may have signalled the apostle's opening heart toward the Gentiles, those regarded as unclean by the Jews.

The Conversion of Cornelius (10:1-48)

- A. The vision of Cornelius (vv. 1-8)
 - 1. His character (vv. 1-2): A God-fearing centurion named Cornelius was stationed in Caesarea, about thirty miles north of Joppa. Centurions were the foundation of the Roman military presence in Palestine. They served under a tribune and commanded one hundred infantrymen. Romans

chose brave, stable, reliable men to serve as centurions. Furthermore, Cornelius was a devout, prayerful, generous man.

2. The appearance of the angel (vv. 3-8): About six o'clock in the afternoon an angel appeared to this devout God-fearer. The heavenly messenger commended Cornelius for his devotion and told the centurion to send for Simon Peter. As soon as the angel departed, Cornelius sent three men to accompany Peter to Caesarea.
- B. The vision of Simon Peter (vv. 9-16): The next day, about three o'clock, Peter went to roof of the tanner's home to pray. As he prayed, Peter grew hungry and called for food, and, awaiting his meal, the apostle fell into a trance. Peter saw a three-fold vision in this ecstatic state. A large sheet descended from the heavens, containing a host of animals, clean and unclean. A voice told Peter to kill and eat. Of course, Peter's Jewish upbringing recoiled from eating unclean animals, but the voice insisted that Peter kill and eat. This vision clearly prepared Peter's heart for the arrival of Cornelius' messengers.
- C. The arrival of the messengers (vv. 17-23a): The vision of the animals confused Peter, but, as he pondered these things, the three messengers arrived in Joppa. They told the apostle of the angel's appearance to Cornelius and invited Peter to accompany them on their return journey to Caesarea.
- D. Peter's ministry to the household of Cornelius (vv. 23b-48)
1. Cornelius' greeting (vv. 23b-33): Four days after the angel's appearance to Cornelius, Peter arrived in Caesarea, and the centurion greeted the apostle warmly. Also, Cornelius recounted the message of the angel and the mission of the servants sent to bring Peter to Caesarea.
 2. Peter's sermon (vv. 34-43): This sermon follows a similar pattern to the preaching of the primitive church: Jesus' Lordship, empowerment by the Holy Spirit, miraculous signs and wonders, crucifixion, and resurrection. As before, Peter emphasized that he and the other apostles were eyewitnesses of all these wonderful

events in the life of Jesus; then, the apostle concluded his message by promising forgiveness for all who believe in the Lord.

3. Baptism of the Holy Spirit (vv. 44-48): Before Peter could complete his sermon, the Holy Spirit came upon all who heard the gospel. Jewish Christians marveled that these Gentiles received the gift of the Spirit, but they consented because of the undeniable evidences they observed.

Controversy over the Conversion of the Gentiles (11:1-18)

- A. Concern about Peter's activities (vv. 1-3): News spread quickly of Peter's ministry in Caesarea, and a group of Jewish Christians criticized the apostle's work, especially the fact that he ate with Gentiles. Some contemporary scholars have argued that James (the half-brother of Jesus) led an extremist group within the early church, and these Judaizers favoured James over Peter. However, the text gives no indication of a personal power struggle between Peter and James.
- B. Peter's defence (vv. 4-17): Peter defended the work of God, not his own activities. This seems important to the text. The unfair criticism of fellow believers did not embitter or anger Peter. He did not defend himself; rather, he simply recounted what God had done, and left matters in God's hands.
- C. Resolution of the conflict (v. 18): Peter's critics could not argue against the work of God. Instead of perpetuating the debate, these folks rejoiced that the Lord had granted repentance to the Gentiles.

About the Letter of First Peter

The Early Church's Observations of This Epistle

There are clear parallels to First Peter in Clement of Rome's Epistle to the Corinthians (written about A.D. 95.) Clement's reference to the blood of Christ as being "precious" is strikingly similar to Peter's statement in 1:19. By the time of Polycarp (A.D. 69-156) there is much evidence that the Epistle of First Peter was known and used by the Church. For example, in his Epistle to the Philippians Polycarp incorporates 1 Peter 2:22,24, even using the same word for

“tree” as did Peter (E. Harrison, p. 372.) Toward the end of the second century, writing in about A.D. 185, Irenaeus not only quotes 1 Peter 1:8 but also introduces the quotation with the words, “and Peter says in his epistle.” In the next century, Clement of Alexandria and Tertullian quote Peter’s epistle and refer to the apostle by name. The church historian Eusebius (A.D. 264-340) notes that Papias, who had been bishop of Asia Minor around A.D. 125, “used quotations from the first Epistle of John and likewise also from that of Peter” (S. Kistemaker, p. 6.) Thus, there is clear and ample evidence that the early Church received this epistle as authentic and apostolic.

Having said this, it must be pointed out that neither this epistle nor the Epistle of Second Peter are mentioned in the Muratorian Fragment (the earliest extant listing of canonical books.) Some scholars have supposed that this could only mean that the church at Rome toward the close of the second century did not regard these epistles as canonical. However, it must be noted that the Muratorian Fragment is just that, a fragment. The clearly corrupted state of the text makes any certain inferences from omissions precarious. Furthermore, this apparent omission, (which in all likelihood should be attributed to the corrupted state of the Muratorian Fragment,) can hardly offset the widespread authority that the Epistle of First Peter enjoyed (as noted from its citations and acceptance by the church fathers mentioned above.) Although this epistle may not have been used as freely in the West as in the East, (since it was addressed to the churches of the East, note 1 Peter 1:1), there is no evidence that it was ever disputed.

Challenge to Petrine Authorship Addressed

First Peter is one of the finest examples of Greek prose in the New Testament. Therein lies the problem. Numerous scholars have found it difficult to accept the Petrine authorship of this epistle on the ground that the language and style are correct Greek and the form is too idiomatic to be the work of and “unlettered and ignorant” Galilean fisherman (as Peter is described in Acts 4:13) to whom Greek was a foreign language .

The rebuttal to this criticism is to be found in Peter’s own testimony: “*By Silvanus, our faithful brother ... I have written to you*” (5:12.) Though Peter claims to have written the epistle, he says that it was “through” Silvanus that he did so. (Note: Scholars are in general agreement that Silvanus is none other than Silas, the associate of the Apostle Paul whom we meet in the Book of Acts.) Peter adds the comment that Silvanus is a faithful, or trustworthy, brother. Doubtful that Peter would use such language merely to state the technical competence of Silvanus as a secretary who faithfully recorded the words dictated to him. Scholars go on to say, “The only alternative that remains is ...

that Silvanus' part in the composition [of the epistle] was so important and so large that its performance required a considerable degree of trustworthiness."

With regard to Silvanus' (Silas') role in the composition of First Peter, it is of great interest to note that Paul not only joins Silvanus with himself as in some sense responsible for the Thessalonian Epistles (1 Thess. 1:1; 2 Thess. 1:1), but uses the first person plural very liberally in the text of those epistles. This seems to suggest something approaching joint authorship (under apostolic authority.) From his study of the Apostolic Decree of Acts 15, the Epistles of 1 and 2 Thessalonians, and 1 Peter, it is concluded that Silas was not merely a messenger of the Apostolic Council, but helped to shape the language of the document issued by that council (Selwyn especially calls attention to the Greek text of Acts 15:23.) It is asserted that certain similarities appear in all three of these literary units (The Apostolic Decree, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, and 1 Peter) that help strengthen the case that Silvanus did more than merely write down the text of 1 Peter as it was dictated to him. Likely, the thoughts of Peter are pressed into the mould of the language of Silvanus, at least to a considerable degree (E. Harrison, p. 382.) Note: We must always bear in mind, in accordance with the Apostle Peter's own testimony (2 Pet. 1:21), that this whole process was under the absolute control of the Holy Spirit.

Another objection raised against the Petrine authorship of First Peter is the situation of the churches to whom the epistle is addressed. The author is writing to persecuted Christians (1:6; 2:12,15; 4:12, 14-16; 5:8-9), and he particularly mentions the reproach they are suffering for the name of Christ. It is therefore assumed (by those who question or deny Petrine authorship) that Christianity had by the time of the writing of this epistle become a crime in itself, as distinct from the mere social nuisance it was considered to be at an earlier time. It is further pointed out that the persecution that occurred during the reign of Nero was directed against Christians in Rome; there is no evidence that such persecution spread to the eastern provinces where were located the churches to whom this epistle is addressed. Therefore, it is maintained, if the Neronian persecution is ruled out, this epistle must be alluding to the persecution that broke out against the Church either in the time of Domitian or that of Trajan. Whichever the case, this would rule out Petrine authorship, since, according to tradition, Peter was martyred in the time of Nero .

In answer to this objection it must be pointed out that the assertion that the Neronian persecution was limited to Rome and failed to extend to the provinces remains doubtful. Even if it did not officially extend to the eastern provinces, the pernicious influence of the Neronian persecution could well have had an impact on those distant provinces. As D. Guthrie notes (pp.782-783), "the savage nature

of Nero's treatment of [Christians] must have been widely known throughout the provinces." Zealous or sycophantic governors could have taken a cue from Rome and implemented their own local persecution of the Christian church. Opponents of Christianity, upon hearing the report of Rome's treatment of its Christian community, may have become emboldened to aggressively vent their hatred against the local church.

Furthermore, the actual character of the "persecution" referred to in 1 Peter seems to be non-official. That is to say, Peter does not appear to be alluding to any State-instigated persecution directed against the Church, the type of persecution experienced by the churches in Smyrna (Rev. 2:10) and Pergamum (Rev. 2:13) at a later date. On the contrary, as E. Harrison observes (p. 384), the persecution suffered by the churches to whom Peter writes appears to have been that of personal attack made by individuals or groups of private citizens who were incensed at (and convicted by) the separatist tendencies of the Christian community, namely, their refusal to any longer engage in the moral wantonness and depravity of their unconverted neighbours (4:1-4.) It should also be noted that the term "persecution" does not occur in the epistle; Peter consistently uses the more general term "sufferings." The sufferings experienced by these churches are said to be of the same kind as that experienced by their brethren throughout the world (5:9.) Also, the trials mentioned in 1 Peter 1:6 include the whole gamut of the Christian's encounter with and struggle against the flesh, the devil, and the world. Finally, from the very inception of the Church, Christians have suffered specifically for the name of Christ. Jesus Himself foretold this ("*You shall be hated by all men for the sake of my name,*" Matt. 10:22) and the apostles rejoiced that they were considered worthy to suffer dishonour for the Name (Acts 5:41.) Facing opposition and suffering for the name of Christ hardly need be taken as an indication of a late first century setting, at which time the Church had become an official outlaw in the eyes of the blasphemous Roman State.

On the more positive side, there is evidence within the Epistle itself that bears testimony to its Petrine authorship. Certain autobiographical touches in the Epistle can readily be linked with items of information about Peter contained in the Gospels. For instance, Peter's own severe testing of faith (Lk. 22:31-32) accords with his reference to the proving of his readers' faith (1 Pet. 1:7), and the Lord's prediction that Peter would thereafter be able to strengthen his brethren meshes with the thrust of the epistle as a whole (note, especially, 5:10.) Jesus' conversation with Peter in Galilee after the resurrection (Jn. 21) seems to be reflected in the writer's description of believers as sheep (2:25; 5:2-3.) The injunction to be clothed with humility (5:5) causes us to recall the scene in the

upper room (recorded in John 13) where Jesus girded Himself with a towel and washed the disciples' feet.

The Purpose of This Epistle

Christianity grew up within Judaism, which was a *religio licita*; that is to say, a religion permitted and protected by the Roman State. But then the martyrdom of James, our Lord's brother, took place in A.D. 62 (according to the Jewish historian Josephus.) It was this martyrdom that made the separation between Christianity and Judaism inevitable and opened the way for the storm of persecution that would occur in the subsequent decades. Within two years of the death of James, privileges hitherto enjoyed were withdrawn from the Church and Christianity came to be regarded as an illegal order. Roman historians (Tacitus and Suetonius) give clear indication of the growth of anti-Christian sentiment in Roman in A.D. 64. This climate of popular hostility against the Church, and with the loss of official State protection, it was relatively easy for Nero to put the blame on Christians for the great fire that devastated Rome and instigate a persecution of the Church. As noted earlier, the savage nature of Nero's treatment of Christians must have been widely known throughout the provinces. Consequently, zealous or sycophantic governors could have taken a cue from Rome and implemented their own localized attacks against the Church. Or they may have looked the other way, allowing the opponents of Christianity to become emboldened to aggressively vent their hatred against the local church. It is in this spiritual and social climate and against this backdrop that Peter sends his epistle to the churches. The Epistle was probably written from Rome ("*Babylon*" being a cryptic name for that imperial city), perhaps in A.D. 64-65, when persecution had already broken out in Rome and was likely to be a serious threat to the churches in the eastern provinces as well.

Indeed, the ominous shadow of persecution (as well as the ever-present hostility of the world against Christ and His church, note John 15:18-19) was the occasion for this epistle. Suffering is one of the keynotes of the letter, being mentioned no less than sixteen times. In this epistle Peter presents the Christian perspective on suffering. Suffering, in all of its various manifestations, is intended to test and verify the Christian's faith; and when, by the grace of God, that suffering is faithfully endured, it shall result in "*praise and glory*" (to God) and "*honour*" for the believer (1:6-7.) The Christian should not think it strange when he encounters suffering; on the contrary, he must recognize that he is partaking in the sufferings of Christ (4:12-13.) For this reason he should rejoice, because the experience of (and the endurance of) suffering indicate that he indeed shares in the life and, therefore, the salvation of Christ. The Christian who is suffering should be conscious of God's faithful watchfulness (2:19) and

devote himself to his faithful Creator by continuing to live a consistent Christian life (4:19.) The Christian must remember that Christ our Saviour also suffered, leaving us an example: He endured His sufferings; He did not retaliate; He committed Himself to the One who is the righteous Judge, even God His Father (2:21-23.) Peter also gives to the suffering Christian the assurance that after he has suffered a little while, the God of all grace shall personally “*restore, establish, and strengthen you*” (5:10.)

Despite the emphasis on suffering, the Epistle of First Peter is essentially the Epistle of hope, a living hope founded on the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Christ’s resurrection carries with it the assurance of a glorious inheritance that is described by Peter as being incorruptible, undefiled and unfading. It is an inheritance reserved in heaven for the Christian, who in turn is being preserved by God (1:3-5.) Peter presents this blessed truth concerning the Christian’s living hope and glorious inheritance at the very outset of his epistle in order to encourage his fellow believers as they encounter the manifold, and sometimes fiery, trials in this present world.

Before drawing this segment of our article to a close, we should note the Apostle Peter’s own statement of purpose as it appears at the end of the epistle (5:12.) Not only has his intention been to exhort these congregations to stand steadfast in the midst of their present trials by focusing on the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ and the glorious inheritance He has secured for us; Peter has also written to assure the Church that “*this is the true grace of God.*” In other words, the gospel, together with all Jesus has taught and commanded through His apostles, are the doctrines that introduce us to the grace of God and allow us to partake of it. Peter is hereby commending to the Church the apostolic teaching in distinction from whatever spurious claims may be presented by any false teachers who may seek to deceive the Church and lead it to destruction. This is the theme Peter will develop in his second epistle.

Outline

| | |
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| 1 | The privilege and destiny of believers; the cost and purpose of their redemption |
| 2:1-10 | The church as a temple with Christ as the chief cornerstone |
| 2:11-3:7 | Social duties of the Christian citizen, servant, wife and husband |
| 3:8-ch. 4 | Fellowship with Christ in prayer and service, in trial and reproach. |
| Ch. 5 | Duties of seniors and juniors. Salutations. |

About the Letter of Second Peter

The Early Church's Observations of This Epistle

“No one of the [General] Letters or Epistles, nor any book of the entire New Testament for that matter, has been more strenuously debated as to its authorship and its place in early Christianity than this second epistle attributed to Peter.”

In the beginning of the third century, Origen is the first writer who, by quoting 2 Peter six times, calls the epistle Scripture. Even then, the church historian Eusebius informs us that Origen expressed some reservation. According to Eusebius, Origen maintained, “Peter ... has left one acknowledged epistle, and, it may be, a second also; for it is doubted.” About A.D. 325, Eusebius classified 2 Peter with the so-called controversial writings and refused to include this epistle in the Canon. Toward the end of the fourth century, Jerome acknowledged that Simon Peter composed two epistles that were called General Epistles (i.e.; intended for wider circulation as opposed to being addressed to one individual church.) But, Jerome added, many people doubt the authenticity of 2 Peter. Eventually, the universal Church accepted 2 Peter as canonical; the Council of Laodicea (A.D. 360) and the Council of Carthage (A.D. 397) placed 2 Peter among the accepted apostolic writings. Nevertheless, doubts concerning the canonicity of 2 Peter still lingered. It is noteworthy that even as late as the Reformation era this Epistle was questioned: whereas Martin Luther acknowledged its genuineness, John Calvin felt some hesitancy in accepting it.

Before moving on to consider the reason for suspicions about 2 Peter, it needs to be pointed out that there is no evidence from any part of the early Church that this Epistle was ever rejected as spurious, in spite of the hesitancy that existed over its reception.

Challenges to Petrine Authorship Addressed

The main hesitation in according Second Peter its rightful place in the canon is the difference in literary style between it and First Peter. Jerome had written, “The second of Peter’s epistles is denied by very many to be his on account of dissonance of style with the first” (E. Harrison, p. 389.) In 1 Peter the manner of presentation is smooth and polished. This is not true of Peter’s second Epistle. The second Epistle features a style that is abrupt and the wording is stilted. In Greek, the usual connecting particles that link sentences and clauses are missing. Then, too, there is an extensive amount of words (fifty-seven) that are unique to this epistle, being found neither in 1 Peter nor in any other New Testament book.

This is the chief reason for the hesitancy to immediately accept 2 Peter as canonical without reservation. However, a satisfactory explanation that accounts for the divergence in style is readily available. One must remember that Peter, by his own testimony, had made use (we may even say, extensive use) of Silvanus' writing skills in the composition of his first Epistle (note 1 Pet. 5:12 and the discussion above.) Second Peter may have been written by Peter's own hand. Another explanation to account for the difference in style was originally proposed by Jerome, namely, that when composing his second Epistle Peter made use of an amanuensis (i.e.; a secretary) other than Silvanus .

Another objection has to do with the reference to "*the fathers*" in 2 Peter 3:4. In that passage the false teachers are quoted as saying, "*from the day that the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were.*" Critics maintain that this statement suggests that the first generation of Christians is now past. "*Since the fathers fell asleep*" would seem to suggest a second or third generation dating of the Epistle, which would put it well beyond the apostolic period.

This criticism, however, is based on the assumption that "*the fathers*" are the first generation of Christians, including the apostles. But this interpretation is highly unlikely. Nowhere else in the New Testament, nor in the writings of the Apostolic Fathers, is the term "the fathers" used in reference to Christian "patriarchs." It is far more natural to interpret the term as a reference to the Jewish patriarchs of the Old Testament. This is all the more evident when one takes into account the fact that Peter quotes the false teachers as looking beyond these fathers to the beginning of the creation: "*from the day that the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation*" .

On the positive side, there is good internal testimony to the Petrine authorship of this epistle. Throughout the Epistle Peter alludes to incidents that are known from the Gospels; but, as he does so, his wording is considerably different from that of the Gospels. This is an indication that the writer is relying on personal remembrances and relaying those remembrances in his own words, as opposed to repeating the events as they appear in the Gospels in an attempt to convince his readers that he is the Apostle Peter. One example of this is Peter's recollection of Jesus' prediction concerning his death (compare 2 Pet. 1:14 with Jn. 21:18.) Another example is Peter's recollection of the events that transpired on the Mount of Transfiguration; again, Peter's own personal account is consistent with, but distinct from, the Gospels (compare 2 Peter 1:16-18 with Matt. 17:1-8; Mk. 9:2-8; Lk. 9:28-36.)

In closing, we may remark as to what may account for the hesitancy in granting the Epistle of Second Peter unconditional acceptance as a canonical book. If 2

Peter was sent to a restricted destination, it is not difficult to imagine that many churches may not have received it in the earlier history of the Canon. When it did begin to circulate it may well have been received with some suspicion, particularly if by this time some spurious Petrine books were beginning to circulate. Then, too, being that it is a General Epistle (as opposed to being addressed to one specific church) addressing one specific topic (the pernicious activity of false teachers), it may be that no single church took the initiative in testifying to its apostolicity and urging its place in the canon.

The Purpose and Theme of This Epistle

As noted in our discussion of First Peter, at the end of that epistle Peter set forth his purpose in writing; namely, to exhort his readers to stand fast in the midst of their suffering and to assure them that the teaching they received from the apostles is “*the true grace of God*” (1 Pet. 5:12.) Peter was commending to the churches the apostolic teaching in distinction from whatever spurious claims might be presented by any false teachers who might seek to deceive the church and lead it to destruction. This is the theme that Peter now develops in his second Epistle.

Scholars comment that this second epistle has about it such an air of urgency that it must be supposed that some definite threat of an infiltration of false teachers had arisen. Apparently, the threat Peter foresaw and against which he cautioned the churches had become a potentially serious matter. But, continues Guthrie, since the future tense is mainly used (note 2 Pet. 2:1-ff.), it must be further supposed that this epistle was intended as a preventative measure. The threat is very real, but it has not yet worked its destructiveness in the churches.

What exactly was the threat posed by the false teachers of whom Peter warns the churches? It was anti-nomianism. The false conclusion that since the Christian is saved by grace he is therefore free to indulge the old sinful nature with impunity. (Note: This is the same error the Apostle Paul addresses in Romans 6.) Peter describes these teachers in the following terms: they are “*denying the Master who bought them,*” (i.e.; they refuse to submit to the Lordship of Christ); Peter speaks of “*their licentious conduct;*” they “*live for the flesh with it corrupting passion;*” “*they consider it to be a pleasure to engage in self-indulgence;*” “*they revel in their lusts.*”

In countering this challenge to the purity of the Church, indeed, this challenge to the whole purpose of our salvation (note Titus 2:13-14), the Apostle Peter calls upon the Christian to lead a life of holiness and godliness (3:11.) Such a lifestyle is mandatory both because of the righteous judgment of God that will surely be

visited upon this present world as well as the fact that the new creation, (which is the Christian's inheritance,) will be characterized by righteousness (3:11-13.) In closing his epistle, Peter gives the very practical exhortation that the Christian must continue to "*grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ*" (3:18.) As the twentieth-century British preacher Martyn Lloyd-Jones expressed it: The only way to avoid falling in the Christian life is to advance. The only way to avoid slipping back is to go forward. There is no such thing as being static in the Christian life.

Outline

- Ch. 1. Christians are expected to make their calling and election sure, for the gospel message is well founded.
- Ch. 2 Warning against evildoers and false teachers
- Ch. 3 The manner and certainty of the Lord's return

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Peter's First Letter Commentary

1 Peter I: 1-25

1:1-5. Encouraged for suffering

Verses 1-4. A basis for courage

An apostle is one who is sent forth. Peter, as one of the twelve apostles whom Jesus Christ chose, represented him as a witness. In his role as a witness, Peter made known that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that, on the basis of faith in him, individuals could be forgiven of their sins and reconciled to his Father. To authenticate his testimony, Peter had been empowered to perform miracles, healing the sick, making the crippled whole, raising the dead, and freeing individuals from demonic possession. (Matthew 10:8; Mark 3:13-16; Acts 3:2-7, 11-16; 5:12-16; 9:32-42) Jesus Christ gave the name “Cephas” or “Peter” (meaning “rock”) to him, revealing his confidence that he, Simon, would prove to be solid like a rock in his faith and a strengthening aid to fellow believers. (1:1; Mark 3:16; John 1:41, 42)

The “elect” are those whom God chose to be his people, for they responded in faith to his Son. In the world, believers were strangers, for theirs was a heavenly inheritance. They lived in widely scattered areas among the masses of unbelievers. Therefore, Peter addressed the “elect” or divinely chosen ones as sojourners or resident aliens “of the dispersion.” The believers to whom he sent his letter resided in five regions of Asia Minor. Pontus was situated along the Black Sea in northern Asia Minor and was bordered by Galatia on the south and Bithynia on the west. Cappadocia bordered Galatia on the east, and the Roman province of Asia lay along the western border of Galatia and extended to the coast.

The election or choosing of believers is “according to the foreknowledge of God the Father.” He foreknew or predetermined that there would be humans who would come to be his approved children. In keeping with his predetermined purpose and through the operation of his holy spirit, the chosen ones are “sanctified” or set apart as holy for his use. The objective of the election and sanctification is “for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ.” Numerous translations render the words to indicate that Jesus Christ is the one who is to be obeyed (“to be obedient to Jesus Christ and to be sprinkled with his blood” [NRSV]; “for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling with his blood” [REB]; “that they might obey Jesus Christ and be cleansed by his blood” [J. B. Phillips]). The Greek text, however, does not specifically link Jesus Christ to the

obedience. Peter's focus had been on what "God the Father" has done for believers, and so it appears preferable to consider God to be the implied object of the obedience. "God wanted you to obey him and to be made clean by the blood of the death of Jesus Christ." (NCV) Considering the "obedience" to mean obedience to God would also fit Peter's later admonition for believers to conduct themselves like "obedient children" (literally, "children of obedience"). (1:2, 14)

The "sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ" could relate to two prominent aspects in the lives of the chosen ones. When individual Israelites became ceremonially unclean, they needed to be sprinkled with the water of cleansing in order to be purified from defilement. (Numbers 19:11-20) At the time the law covenant was inaugurated, Moses sprinkled the Israelites with the blood of sacrificed animals. (Exodus 24:5-8) Therefore, the "sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ" could refer to the purification from sins made possible by his blood and the validating of the new covenant by means of his shed blood. In being sprinkled with the "blood of Jesus Christ," God's chosen ones are forgiven of their sins and become beneficiaries of the new covenant. (1:2)

"Favour" or unmerited kindness includes all the divinely granted aid and blessings that believers come to enjoy. "Peace" is the sense of tranquillity and well-being that comes from the inward assurance of divine love, concern, and care. Peter's prayerful desire was for believers to continue to experience "favor and peace" in increased measure. (1:2)

For the "God and [*kaí*] Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" to be "blessed" would signify that he be magnified and praised for all that he is and has done. The Greek conjunction *kaí*, often translated "and," can in certain contexts mean "even." A number of translators have adopted this significance, choosing not to identify the Father as the God of the Lord Jesus Christ. "Praise God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." (CEV) "Blessed be God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." (NJB) The context, however, does not require departing from the usual meaning "and" for the conjunction *kaí*, especially since the Scriptures speak of Jesus as calling his Father "my God." (1:3; John 20:17; Revelation 3:12)

In his great mercy, God took the initiative to provide the means to deliver humans from their sinful condition, granting all who respond in faith to his Son a newness of life. In being thus generated anew in expression of divine mercy, believers have been forgiven of their sins, passing from a condition of death (the condemnation to which sin leads) to life as God's approved and beloved children. As a result of their new birth, believers have a "living hope." This hope may be regarded as "living" because it energizes its possessors, fills them with courage, and holds promise of certain fulfilment. A dead hope would be no hope at all, as it would never be fulfilled and so could only end in disappointment.

The “living hope” has been made possible “through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.” His resurrection proved undeniably that his sacrificial death had been accepted by his Father as the means for forgiving humans of their sins and reconciling them to himself as his children. Jesus’ resurrection assured that all of his Father’s promises would be fulfilled, providing a solid basis for the believers’ hope that they will be united with Christ, enjoying an enduring relationship with him and his Father as part of the sinless family of his Father’s children. (1:3)

Believers have been generated anew through the operation of God’s spirit, and this has made it possible for them to embrace the “living hope.” As children of their heavenly Father, they are also heirs. They have been granted a newness of life “for an inheritance,” one that is “imperishable and undefiled and unfading, reserved in the heavens for [them].” Being imperishable, this inheritance cannot be ruined, destroyed, damaged, or corrupted in any way. Unlike inheritances that can be defiled through misuse or attained by base means, this inheritance is free from all impurity. It will never lose its attractiveness like material things that are subject to fading and cease to have their former vibrancy. The inheritance is secure, for it is “reserved in the heavens.” There, in the exalted heavenly realm, God safeguards the inheritance. No one can deprive believers of it, or their share with Jesus Christ in everything that his Father has given him. (1:4)

Verse 5. Present status of the sufferers

Believers also have the assurance of God’s help in attaining their secure inheritance. They are “safeguarded by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.” God’s power is at work for them like a protective fortress. By means of his spirit, he strengthens believers to endure trials and to conduct themselves acceptably to him. This incomprehensibly great power was involved in raising Jesus Christ from the dead and is now at work in believers. (Ephesians 1:19, 20) It is through their faith, or their unqualified trust, in God and Christ that believers have come to benefit from the protective divine power. Their continuing to maintain faith with God’s help assures that they will never be without his strengthening aid. (1:5; see the Notes section.)

The “salvation ready to be revealed in the last time” and for which believers are being safeguarded by the “power of God” designates the future deliverance they will experience at the time of Jesus Christ’s return in his exalted position as King of kings and Lord of lords. At that “last time,” the culminating point of the age that had its start when Jesus Christ was on earth, all who defiantly persist in unbelief would face eternal ruin. Believers, however, would escape condemnatory judgment and be delivered from the affliction they had

experienced on account of being servants of God and Christ. First those then asleep in death would be resurrected, and the living believers would be changed, making it possible for all of them to be united with Jesus Christ for all eternity as sinless children of his Father. (1:5; 1 Corinthians 15:51-54; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17; 2 Thessalonians 1:5-10)

1:6-9. Tested for suffering

Verse 6. The proper attitude toward suffering

For believers, this sure hope of future salvation and the divine mercy that makes the marvellous deliverance possible provide the basis for rejoicing. During their alien residence in the world, they “for a little while now, if it must be,” are saddened on account of “various trials.” From the standpoint of eternity, any affliction or hardship believers might experience would be for a very short time. Despite their distress, if suffering came to be their lot on account of being disciples of God’s Son, they could rejoice, confident that their future deliverance was certain. They could also find joy in knowing that the trials could result in spiritual benefits for them. (1:6)

Verses 7-9. The purpose of suffering

Trials, when endured in a manner that honours God and Christ, produce a refined faith. These trials can expose weaknesses, making the afflicted believers aware of the need to cooperate with God’s spirit in resisting pride, impatience, a love of pleasure, stubbornness, anger, or a desire for revenge. As a consequence, faith can be strengthened and purified from the stain of undesirable traits and attitudes. The believer can come to rely more fully on God when again faced with suffering. A refined faith is of exceedingly greater value than gold from which fire has removed impurities, for even gold can perish or wear away. Faith that has been purified by trials, on the other hand, is of an enduring quality and does not perish. Therefore, at the revelation of Jesus Christ, or upon his return, this refined faith will be found to result “in praise and glory and honor.” He will then praise or commend those who have allowed their faith to be purified, grant them the “glory” or magnificence of sharing with him in his inheritance as the highly exalted Son of God, and accord them “honor” when acknowledging them as his approved disciples, doing so before his Father and the angels. (1:7; Matthew 10:32; Luke 12:8; 18:8)

Peter had personally seen Jesus Christ at the time he was on earth, but those to whom he sent his letter had not. Though they had never seen the Son of God, they loved him. The message about him, including his dying for them in expression of his love, stirred within them a deep affection for him and moved

them to want to be his devoted disciples. Because Jesus was then in the heavenly realm, these believers could not see him but they could have faith in him, trusting him unreservedly. They could have full confidence that all the divine promises would be fulfilled because of what Jesus Christ had done when surrendering his life for them. The reliable testimony that had been given to them about him and which they accepted provided them with the sound basis for rejoicing with a joy so great that it could not be expressed in words. It is a “glorious joy,” one that is suggestive of the excelling joy believers will experience upon being found approved by the Son of God and his Father. (1:8)

1:10-12. Salvation and suffering

Verses 10-11. The search of the prophets

This joy relates to their receiving the “end,” goal, culmination, or final outcome of their faith, “the salvation of [their] souls.” The expression “souls” designates the believers in the entirety of their being. They themselves would attain their final salvation as sinless children of God who escaped the ruin of those who chose stubbornly to remain in unbelief. (1:9)

The ancient Hebrew prophets had an intense interest in the promised salvation. They searched and investigated what God’s spirit had revealed to them, wanting to know about the gracious favour or unmerited kindness that, in the future, would be shown to humans, to persons with faith in Jesus as the promised Messiah or Christ. The gracious favour that came to be extended to those who put faith in Jesus Christ included forgiveness of sins and reconciliation with his Father as his beloved children. Although not really understanding the message about divine favour that they made known, the prophets carefully reflected on the prophecies about the coming Messiah and what God would accomplish through him. (1:10)

According to the majority of extant manuscripts, the “spirit of Christ” was “in” the prophets. Fourth-century Codex Vaticanus, however, does not include “Christ.” If original, the expression “spirit of Christ” may indicate that the spirit operating in the prophets was the same spirit that Christ imparted to his disciples on the day of Pentecost in the year he rose from the dead. Upon his ascension to heaven, he received the Holy Spirit from his Father. Therefore, the holy spirit would also be the “spirit of Christ.” (1:11; Acts 2:33)

Verse 12. The benefactors of the prophetic message

The prophets eagerly sought to learn just what had been revealed to them through the operation of God’s spirit, investigating “what [*tína*], or what kind of

time,” the spirit’s advance testimony revealed about the “sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories.” The Greek pronoun *tína* is masculine and so could designate the one “to whom,” “to what person,” or “to what sort of person” the spirit was pointing. A number of translations convey this meaning. “So they searched to find out exactly who Christ would be and when this would happen.” (CEV) They were “inquiring about the person or time that the Spirit of Christ within them indicated.” (NASB) Other translations have rendered *tína* as a neuter pronoun and, in conjunction with “what kind of time,” make an application to “time and circumstances” (NAB, REB) “The prophets tried to learn about what the Spirit was showing them, when those things would happen, and what the world would be like at that time.” (NCV) It would appear that the interest of the prophets is more likely to have been on the person of the Messiah or Christ and the time of his appearing rather than on the time of and the conditions existing at his arrival. (1:11)

With God’s spirit operating upon them, the prophets came to know much about the sufferings and the glories of the Messiah. He would be regarded with contempt and rejected. (Isaiah 53:3) A close associate would betray him for thirty pieces of silver. (Psalm 41:9; Zechariah 11:12) Accusers would present false testimony against him, but he would remain silent. He would be struck on the cheek, spit upon, reckoned with sinners, be pierced, and die a sacrificial death as a sin bearer. (Isaiah 50:6; 53:3-12; Micah 5:1) His enemies would taunt him, ridiculing his trust in God. (Psalm 22:8) The subsequent glories included his being resurrected from the dead, coming to be at the right hand of God, and being granted the position of king-priest like Melchizedek of ancient Salem. (Psalm 16:8-10; 110:1, 4) As the one with God-given royal authority, he would crush all who defiantly oppose him and then rule over the whole earth. (1:11; Psalm 2:9; 72:7, 8; Zechariah 9:9, 10)

While many details about the Messiah had been disclosed to the prophets, they did not understand how all this would be fulfilled and how, through him, sins would be forgiven and humans would become reconciled to God as part of his family of beloved children. (1:11) They found themselves in a position like Daniel when he said, “I heard, but I did not understand.” (Daniel 12:8)

Through divine revelation, the prophets came to discern that what had been made known to them would benefit those who would be living from the time of Messiah’s or Christ’s arrival and then onward. Those who saw how Jesus Christ fulfilled the prophecies about him and put faith in him benefited fully from what the prophets had long previously foretold. So it was to them that the prophets ministered. This included the believers to whom Peter wrote concerning the prophets “to whom it was revealed that, not to themselves, but to you [‘to us,’

according to a number of other manuscripts] they were ministering them.” The pronoun “them” pertains to the prophetic matters concerning which the prophets ministered or served. A number of translations make this significance explicit. “It was shown them [the prophets] that their service was not for themselves but for you, when they told about the truths you have now heard.” (NCV) “It was disclosed to them that these matters were not for their benefit but for yours.” (REB) The matters that had been announced to the believers to whom Peter wrote included how Jesus Christ fulfilled the words of the prophets. (1:12; compare Acts 2:14-36; 3:12-26; 13:16-47; 26:22, 23.)

When proclaiming the evangel, Jesus Christ’s disciples were guided and empowered by the “holy spirit sent from heaven.” To those in Asia Minor, they had made known that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and that, through him, individuals could be forgiven of their sins and reconciled to God. These were matters into which angels desired to look attentively. The Greek verb referring to the action of angels is *parakypso*, literally meaning to “bend down beside” or to “bend over,” and is descriptive of the special attention one would give when bending over to take a closer look at something. Angels are not all-knowing. Although not personally involved in God’s means for effecting a reconciliation of sinful humans to himself, they took a keen interest in wanting to know how this would be accomplished. This also revealed to them to an even greater degree the love, mercy, and wisdom of their God and Father, which must have filled them with reverential wonder.

1:13-21. Holy living and suffering.

Verses 13-17. The exhortation to holy living

On account of all that believers had come to enjoy, they should “gird up the loins of [their] mind.” The “girding up of the loins” is a figure of speech based on what a person would do in preparation for manual labor or vigorous activity like running. A man would pull up his robe between his legs and secure it with a girdle, giving him greater freedom of movement. To “gird up the loins of the mind” would indicate to seek to have the mind in a state of preparedness for action, ridding oneself of anything that could hinder one in being properly focused on faithfully serving God and Christ. A number of translators have paraphrased the figurative expression according to its apparent meaning and rendered the next Greek word (*népho*) to signify “to be alert” or “to have self-control.” “Your minds must therefore be stripped for action and fully alert.” (REB) “So prepare your minds for service and have self-control.” (NCV) The verb *népho* can denote to be vigilant, watchful, sober, or alert. It is descriptive of one’s being in control of one’s senses, showing reasonableness and self-restraint and avoiding rash words or actions. (1:13)

Punctuation determines whether the Greek adverb *teleíos* is to be understood as meaning “fully” or “completely” and modifying the verb *népho* (“be fully alert”; or, “maintain [your] senses completely”) . If regarded as starting a new thought, *teleíos* could apply to setting the hope fully. This is the meaning numerous translations convey. (1:13) “Set your hopes completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.” (NAB) “Set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed.” (NIV) “Set your hope perfectly, wholly, and unchangeably, without doubt and despondency, upon the grace that is being brought to you upon the occasion of the revelation of Jesus Christ.” (Wuest) “Put all your hope in how kind God will be to you when Jesus Christ appears.” (CEV)

As resident aliens scattered among masses of unbelievers in the world, believers face distress. So they need to keep their focus on the gracious favor that will be extended to them at the “revelation of Jesus Christ,” never ceasing to hope in the unmerited kindness they will then be shown. They will be delivered from all the affliction they have experienced and be united with Christ as sinless children of his Father at the time he returns as King of kings and Lord of lords. (1:13)

Confident in becoming recipients of divine favor when Jesus Christ returns with royal power and unparalleled glory or magnificence, believers should be conducting themselves like his Father’s “obedient children,” faithfully adhering to his ways in disposition, word, and deed. This would require that they cease to conform to their former ways, not yielding to the base desires they had during the time of their ignorance. Before they heard the good news about Christ and became believers, they had lived their lives as their passions or desires dictated, often harming themselves or others in their ignorance of God’s ways. (1:14)

Through the proclamation of the message about his Son, God called those to whom Peter sent his letter. They were invited to accept his arrangement for having their sins forgiven and to become members of his beloved family. He is “holy,” pure, untainted by any trace of defilement. In keeping with his holiness, believers, as his children, should be “holy in all [their] conduct.” Peter backed this up with a quotation from Leviticus 19:2 (LXX), “Be holy, because I am holy.” (1:15, 16)

The context in which the quotation from Leviticus appears reveals that holiness or purity should involve all of one’s life. Included are commands relating to respect for parents, compassionate consideration for the poor, the deaf, the blind, and the resident aliens; honesty, truthful speech, high moral standards, and impartiality in rendering judgments. (1:16; Leviticus 19:3-36)

The heavenly Father judges humans impartially (literally, “does not accept faces”) on the basis of their deeds and so does not act according to outward appearances. Believers call upon the heavenly Father when making their petitions in prayer. Recognizing that he has no favorites and will always judge justly or fairly, believers should consider that they are accountable to him. Therefore, during their time as resident aliens in this world, they should conduct themselves “in fear,” or with a wholesome fear or reverence of the heavenly Father, the impartial judge. Believers should want to conduct themselves in a manner that he can look upon as acceptable to him. (1:17)

Verses 18-21. The reason for holy living

They were rescued from being dead in trespasses and sins, from a life that reflected the “vain,” empty, or futile conduct that followed the pattern their ancestors had handed down to them. With a price of far greater value than perishable things — silver or gold — they were ransomed, liberated from their sinful condition and the condemnation associated with it. (1:18)

The price for their redemption proved to be beyond any human evaluation. It was the precious blood of Jesus Christ, blood that was like that of a lamb without blemish or defect. (1:19)

“Before the founding of the world,” or from the beginning, Christ was foreknown. God’s purpose had always been for humans to be in a condition of flawless oneness with his Son and so also with himself. So the Son was foreknown from the very beginning as the one who is the focus of his Father’s purpose and activity. The Son’s manifestation came at his Father’s appointed time and marked the start of a new age, with the opportunity opening up to humans everywhere to become part of his Father’s family of approved children. Therefore, Christ could be spoken of as having been manifested or as having appeared at the “last of the times,” or at the end of the ages. (1:20)

Christ’s appearance at the last or end of the times is spoken of as being “for your sake,” that is, for those in Asia Minor to whom the letter was sent and so for all who are believers. With Christ’s coming to the earth, individuals everywhere could benefit from what he accomplished upon surrendering his life in sacrifice. His redemptive work was exclusively for humans. (1:20)

Through Christ, the recipients of Peter’s letter, came to have faith or trust in “God, the one who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that [their] faith and hope would be in God.” The relationship with God as one of faith or trust came into existence “through Christ,” for through him the state of alienation from his Father ended. The redemption from sin and its associated

condemnation came about when Jesus Christ surrendered his life for the sinful human family. The surpassing greatness of what the Father, in expression of his unparalleled love for fallen humans, accomplished by means of his Son gives believers the utmost confidence in his love and care for them and assures them that all of his promises will be fulfilled. God raised Christ from the dead and gave him glory by exalting him to the ultimate position of favor (represented by being at his “right hand”) and granting him all authority in heaven and on earth. (Matthew 28:18; Acts 3:13; Philippians 2:9-11) What God did in resurrecting his Son and granting him glory provides the basis for believers to have trust and hope in him as their heavenly Father. They can trust him fully as their Father who deeply loves them and so will never fail to aid and strengthen them in their time of need. Their hope in his promises will never come to disappointment. (1:21)

1:22-25. Regeneration and behaviour

Verse 22. The responsibility of regeneration.

The “truth” is the message that has Christ as its focus; it is the word of God. Believers obeyed this truth when they accepted Jesus as God’s Son and as the one who died for them. Through this act of responsive obedience, they were forgiven of their sins and so their “souls” or they themselves as persons were purified or cleansed from the stain of their transgressions. As purified persons, they became members of God’s family. This called for them to have genuine affection for fellow children. Their love should be “unhypocritical,” not just a mere expression of the lips but an affection that was evident in deeds reflecting care and compassion. Believers should be loving one another “fervently [*ektenós*] from the heart,” or from their inmost self. The Greek adverb *ektenós* incorporates the thought of “extending” or “stretching out” and so, in relation to love, conveys an image of an unlimited affection, one that is intense and constant. (1:22)

Verses 23-25. The means of regeneration

Believers have been generated anew or have experienced a new birth. This new birth came about from imperishable or incorruptible seed and not from seed that perishes (as is the case with human seed that starts physical existence but is subject to death). This imperishable seed is the “living and enduring word of God.” It is “through” this imperishable word or message that the new birth came about. This message is identified (in verse 25) as the “evangel” that had been proclaimed to the believers being addressed. (1:23)

When they put faith in the good news about Jesus Christ and accepted his having died for them so that they might be forgiven of their sins, God's spirit became the controlling power in their lives. Like a seed, the "word" operating in conjunction with the spirit, brought about a newness of life for them. Being "living [energizing and activating, not dead] and enduring," this word continues to have a powerful effect in the lives of believers, producing permanent changes in them as part of the family of God's children. As indicated in verse 22, the tangible evidence of the new birth that has come about "through" (or by means of) the "word" is the mutual love that believers have as fellow children of God. (1:23; compare 1 John 3:14.)

The quotation from Isaiah 40:6-8 (LXX) serves to show that the "word" does endure, unlike the "flesh" (transitory human life) that "is like grass, and all of its glory," beauty, or splendour, like a blossom on a plant. The grass withers, and the wilted flower drops from the stem. "But the word of the Lord ['our God,' Hebrew text] endures forever." These words from Isaiah appear as part of a message of comfort, including the assurance that God would turn his favorable attention to his people and would care for them like a loving shepherd looks after the sheep. (1:24, 25; Isaiah 40:1-6, 10, 11)

In the fullest sense, God turned his favourable attention to his people when he sent his unique Son to the earth. (Luke 1:68-79) Appropriately, therefore, the "word" is identified as the good news that had been declared to the believers in Asia Minor. This good news focused on Jesus Christ and all that his Father accomplished through him. (1:25)

Notes:

The original reading of fourth-century Codex Sinaiticus for verse 1 includes "and" after "elect" ("to the elect and resident aliens"), but the "and" is missing in all other extant Greek manuscripts.

After the expression "generated anew" (in verse 3), a few manuscripts say "you" instead of "us." The words "living hope" have the best manuscript support. A few manuscripts say "hope of life."

In most extant manuscripts, verse 4 concludes with "for you" (literally, "into you"), but a few manuscripts read "for us."

In verse 5, the reading "power of God" has the best manuscript support. A few manuscripts read "love of God" or "spirit of God."

Similar thoughts about the beneficial effect of trials (as found in verses 6 and 7) are expressed in the books of Wisdom and Sirach. "For though in the sight of

others they [the upright] were punished, their hope is full of immortality. Having been disciplined a little, they will receive great good, because God tested them and found them worthy of himself; like gold in the furnace he tried them, and like a sacrificial burnt offering he accepted them.” (Wisdom 3:4-6, NRSV) “My child, when you come to serve the Lord, prepare yourself for testing.” (Sirach 2:1, NRSV) “Accept whatever befalls you, and in times of humiliation be patient. For gold is tested in the fire, and those found acceptable, in humiliation. Trust in him, and he will help you; make your ways straight, and hope in him. You who fear the Lord, wait for his mercy; do not stray, or else you may fall. You who fear the Lord, trust in him, and your reward will not be lost.” (Sirach 2:4-8, NRSV)

When referring to salvation (verse 9), most manuscripts either read “your” or “our.” Fourth-century Codex Vaticanus and a few other manuscripts, however, omit the pronoun.

Verse 12 contrasts the past with the present — the testimony of the prophets in earlier times and the full revelation “now” through the proclaiming of the evangel, the good news about Christ and what his sacrificial death accomplished.

In verse 22, numerous manuscripts add “through [the] spirit” after “truth,” but these words are not included in the oldest extant manuscripts. Another difference in manuscript readings is the inclusion or omission of the word for “clean” or “pure” as a modifier for “heart.” A corrected reading of fourth-century Codex Sinaiticus is “true heart.”

Another way in which to understand the reference to the “word” (in verse 23) is that it comes from the “living and enduring [or eternal] God.” (NRSV, footnote) In view of the emphasis thereafter on the enduring nature of the word of God, however, it appears that the more likely application is to the “living and enduring word.”

Although missing in the oldest extant manuscripts in verse 23, many later manuscripts add “into the age,” meaning “forever,” after the Greek word for “abiding” or “enduring.”

In verse 24, the reading “glory of it” has the best manuscript support. Many other manuscripts say, “glory of man,” which is also the reading of Isaiah 40:6 in the extant text of the Septuagint.

1 Peter 2:1-25

2:1-3. The believer's growth and suffering

Verse 1. Separation from evil

“Therefore” (in view of having accepted the word of God and experienced being born anew), believers should rid themselves of “all evil and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all defamation.” In the Greek text, the words for hypocrisy, envy, and defamation are plural, suggestive of the various manifestations of such. “All evil” includes all acts that are harmful to oneself or to others and are contrary to God’s revealed will. “All deceit” designates all crafty or underhanded practices, treachery, cunning, and attempts to take unfair advantage of others. A hypocrite is a person who plays a part, hiding his real intent or true identity as if wearing a mask. Expressed as a plural, hypocrisy would embrace all forms of dissembling, putting on a pretence, and hiding one’s real purpose or motivation. Envy, in its various manifestations, involves looking with displeasure at what others may have or what they are able to enjoy and wanting as one’s own that which one begrudges being the possession of others. Defamation, speaking evil of others, or slander stem from the same malicious disposition as envy. All these traits are contrary to the kind of love that should exist among children of God in their interactions with one another and with unbelievers. (2:1)

Verses 2-3. Desire for the Word of God

For believers to grow spiritually, they must free themselves from such corrupt behaviour that contributes to disunity and conflict. Only when love and peace exist can there be progress in living the kind of life that should characterize God’s obedient children. With undesirable traits put away, believers should, “like newborn infants, long for the true [*logikós*], unadulterated [*ádolos*] milk that by it [they] might grow into salvation.” Not all believers in Asia Minor were new believers. So it does not appear that they are being addressed as newborn infants. Instead, the emphasis seems to be on their being like newborn infants who are eager for milk, the liquid nourishment that fully satisfies their need for food and is essential for their growth. (2:2)

Like such infants, believers should long for the “milk” or teaching that is required for spiritual well-being and development. The Greek words that describe this milk are *logikós* and *ádolos*. *Logikós* denotes that which is logical, rational, genuine, or true. Numerous translations render the word as “spiritual” (the opposite of literal). *Ádolos* signifies that which is without deceit, pure, or unadulterated. Earlier, in this letter, the evangel or good news about Christ was

identified as the living and enduring word of God. (1:25) So it would seem that the “true, unadulterated milk” designates the trustworthy, pure teaching about Jesus Christ and what his Father has accomplished through him. The word or message from which believers should derive their spiritual sustenance would include everything that Jesus Christ revealed by his words and the example he set in doing his Father’s will. When believers continue to draw their nourishment from the glad tidings about Christ, centring their thoughts on his example and teaching and striving to imitate him, they will “grow into salvation,” that is, attain to the final deliverance from the distress they experience in the world and come to enjoy the total liberation from sin as part of God’s sinless family. (2:2)

The Greek word *ei* with which the sentence that began in verse 1 continues does not appear to have the usual meaning of “if.” This seems apparent from the word for “tasted,” which is the form of the Greek verb *geúomai* in the aorist tense and indicates a past event. So the preferable meaning for *ei* would appear to be “since” “for,” or “because.” It would be because of having “tasted” or experienced that the “Lord is kind” that believers should crave the “true, unadulterated milk.” Numerous translations convey this significance (“because you have already examined and seen how good the Lord is” [NCV]; “for surely you have tasted that the Lord is good” [REB]; “for you have tasted that the Lord is good” [NAB]). They had come to know the Lord Jesus Christ as being kind. In expression of his love and compassion, he had surrendered his life for them. So they knew that he was kind and loving, displaying the spirit of a caring friend and not the harsh attitude of a superior. (2:3; Matthew 11:28-30; John 15:12-14; see the Notes section and Psalm 34:8 [33:9, LXX], where, with reference to God, the same thought about tasting is expressed.)

2:4-10. Spiritual identity, an encouragement in suffering

Verses 4-8. Identity with Christ.

Unlike unbelievers who reject Jesus Christ, choosing to be far from him, believers would seek to continue to draw close to him. Believers would be coming to him, a “living stone, rejected by men, but chosen [and] precious to God.” They initially came to him upon accepting him as the promised Messiah, the Son of God, and his sacrificial death for them. As believers, they continue to come to him, looking to him for his aid and guidance. He is a “living stone,” not a common stone that has no life-sustaining properties. The Lord Jesus Christ is like the rock from which the Israelites miraculously were provided with life-sustaining water during their time in the wilderness. From him, everything that is essential for eternal life, the life of an enduring relationship with him and his

Father, is available. (2:4; Exodus 17:6; Numbers 20:11; John 4:14; 6:35-37; 7:37, 38; 1 Corinthians 10:4)

The ultimate rejection came when the leading men in the Jewish nation condemned him to death. To God, however, he is “chosen” and “precious.” His Father, according to his predetermined purpose, chose the Son to redeem humans from sin and condemnation and to reconcile them to himself. The Father revealed just how precious his Son is to him when he resurrected him and exalted him as King of kings and Lord of lords with all authority in heaven and on earth. (2:4)

Believers are at one with Jesus Christ and so are sharers in his life, for they enjoy a newness of life on account of their faith in him. As he is the “living stone,” they are “living stones” (forgiven of their sins and so having been liberated from the condemnation to which sin leads, namely, death). They are built on him, being aligned with him as the foundation stone, to form a “spiritual house,” to serve as a “holy priesthood.” In their priestly capacity, they offer “spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.” Seemingly, the entire community of believers is being likened to a “house” or building, with all within this community being priests. The sacrifices they offer are “spiritual,” not like the animal and grain offerings that were then presented at the temple in Jerusalem. These spiritual sacrifices include prayer, praise, thanksgiving, and all the deeds that contribute to the physical and spiritual well-being of others and are an expression of love and concern for those in need. (2:5; Psalm 50:14; 107:22; 141:2; Hosea 14:2; Hebrews 13:15, 16)

On the basis of their faith in Jesus Christ and his having died for them, believers are in an approved condition before his Father and so can present acceptable spiritual sacrifices to him. On their own merit, this would not be possible. It is only “through Jesus Christ” that their spiritual offerings become acceptable. (2:5)

The quotation from Isaiah 28:16 is an abbreviated version of the extant Septuagint text and supports that Jesus Christ is indeed the “stone.” This quotation is introduced with the words, “For it is found in scripture.” Then follows the quotation, “Look! I am laying in Zion a cornerstone, chosen, precious; and the one believing on it [the cornerstone] will not be put to shame.” God laid the cornerstone in Zion. He did so when sending his Son to the earth as the Messiah, Christ, or the Anointed One (the king who was promised to come), and Jesus Christ presented himself as king when he rode into Zion or Jerusalem on a donkey’s colt. It was then that he could have been accepted by all as the precious cornerstone that was rightfully the object of faith, confidence, or trust. All who put their trust in Jesus Christ as the sure foundation for their entire life,

looking to him for aid, guidance, and the sure fulfillment of their God-given hope, will never experience the shame or disappointment of those who find the object of their confidence to be undependable. In the Greek text, there are two different words for “not,” emphasizing that shame would by no means be something believers would experience because of having put their trust in Jesus Christ as the precious cornerstone. God chose his Son to be the dependable “stone,” the “cornerstone” occupying the foremost position in relation to all the other “stones” that would be brought into harmony with and conformity to him. Moreover, Jesus Christ is very precious to his Father, having proved himself flawless under the severest of tests. (2:6)

Believers are in full agreement with God’s evaluation of his Son. To all who put faith in Jesus Christ, he is “precious,” deserving to be accorded the highest honour for what he has done for them when surrendering his life. When the prominent ones in the Jewish nation refused to put faith in him and plotted to have him killed, they proved themselves to be the “builders” who rejected this stone (as expressed in Psalm 118:22 [117:22, LXX]). But their efforts did not prevent his Father from raising him from the dead and highly exalting him with all authority in heaven and on earth, making him the “head of the corner” or the most important stone (either the cornerstone or the head stone). (2:7)

To those who rejected Christ, treating him like a stone that was unfit for their purposes, he came to be (as indicated in Isaiah 8:14) a “stone of stumbling and a rock of offense [or, ‘a rock that causes falling’].” He is like a rock or obstacle in the way of those who persist in unbelief, a rock they cannot avoid encountering, causing them to stumble or to fall to their injury. On account of their “being disobedient to the word,” or their refusing to accept the message about Christ, “they stumble,” their unbelief preventing them from being forgiven of their sins and reconciled to God as his beloved children. Deliberate persistence in unbelief would finally mean a fall resulting in perpetual ruin for them. (2:8)

The words “for which also they were put” are probably to be understood to mean that God established that, to all who would remain disobedient or refuse to believe, the “stone” would be one that causes stumbling or falling. Translators have variously rendered the concluding part of verse 8. “This is the fate appointed for them.” (REB) “They stumble because they do not obey what God says, which is what God planned to happen to them.” (NCV) “It was the fate in store for them.” (NJB) “Yes, they stumble at the Word of God for in their hearts they are unwilling to obey it — which makes stumbling a foregone conclusion.” (J. B. Phillips)

Believers, however, have come to enjoy unparalleled dignity. As a community, they are a “chosen race,” or the people whom God has chosen as his own.

Believers constitute a “royal priesthood.” Their royal or kingly status may indicate that they would be sharing with Christ in his rule or that, by reason of their relationship with him as the King of kings, they are part of the royal family. Their whole life is one devoted to serving God and so the community of believers forms a priesthood. They are a “holy nation,” a people forgiven of their sins and purified on the basis of their faith in Jesus’ sacrifice for them. Having been bought with Jesus’ precious blood, they are his Father’s property and, for this reason, may be called “people for [his] possession.” Believers are uniquely God’s own people. (2:9)

Verses 9-10. Identity with God’s own

The honourable status that has been granted them as an expression of God’s unmerited favour is one of service. Believers are to “proclaim the virtues [or, ‘wonderful acts’] of the one who called [them] out of darkness into his marvellous light.” Their responsibility is to make known to others all that God has done and has proved himself to be, particularly in connection with his Son. (2:9)

Before coming to be believers, they had been in darkness, without enlightenment and the light of God’s favour. They were dead in sins and, like persons groping in the dark, lacked dependable guidance and reliable aid. Upon putting faith in Jesus Christ, they came to enjoy God’s marvellous light. No longer were they in a helpless state and ignorant of God’s ways. Their life came to have purpose as his beloved children, forgiven of their sins and enjoying a newness of life (comparable to being raised from the dead). They ceased to be part of a world that found itself in darkness under the dominion of the powers of darkness and with no hope of liberation from this bondage. (2:9)

The contrast to their past condition is apparently drawn from the prophetic words of Hosea (1:6, 9; 2:1, 23, LXX), “Once [you were] not a people, but now [you are] God’s people; [you were] not granted mercy, but now [you] have been granted mercy.” At the time of their being in a state of alienation from God, they were not his people. Nor were they then recipients of his mercy. Upon becoming believers, they were shown unparalleled compassion, being forgiven of their sins and coming to enjoy God’s loving care, guidance, and aid. (2:10)

2:11-20. The believer’s pilgrimage and suffering.

Verse 11a. Pilgrim character described

Verse 11b-18. Pilgrim conduct enjoined

Peter addressed believers as “beloved ones,” for they were fellow children of God. He admonished them as “strangers and resident aliens” to abstain from “fleshly desires.” They found themselves in the position of strangers and resident aliens among the masses who lived their lives out of harmony with God’s ways. Although believers had been forgiven of their sins and enjoyed an approved standing with God, they were not liberated from their sinful human nature that gave rise to desires which were contrary to a life as his obedient children. Their fleshly desires were comparable to an army that warred “against the soul,” trying to get control of the soul or the entire person and exerting intense pressure to be satisfied. With the aid of and their active cooperation with God’s spirit, believers could resist succumbing to these fleshly desires. (2:11)

As strangers and resident aliens among the nations, believers needed to conduct themselves in a good or exemplary manner. They were often the object of misrepresentation or unfavourable talk because of standing out as different from the people among whom they lived. Their good works, which included rendering compassionate aid to needy ones, and their praiseworthy conduct as honest, reliable, truthful, and caring persons would serve to counteract the misrepresentations of those who maligned them as evildoers. When seeing their good works, persons who had misrepresented believers could come to recognize that they had been wrong when they spoke against them and might be motivated to become believers. This could result in such former detractors being among those who would “glorify God in the day of visitation.” To “glorify God” would mean to praise him for who he is and for everything that he has done. The “day of visitation” designates the future time when God would judge, doing so by means of his Son. (2:12; Acts 17:30, 31)

Each of the various governing authorities existing in society is a “human creation.” Believers should be showing proper regard for the humanly created positions ruling authorities occupy, submitting to persons who exercised authority over them. Believers should not be a disruptive element in the existing social order that contributes to a measure of stability in the world. Their submission to governing authorities is “because of the Lord,” or out of regard for the Lord Jesus Christ whom they want to represent in the best way possible. If they rebelled against duly constituted authority or conducted themselves in violent or disrespectful ways, they would bring reproach on the Son of God and his Father. In the Greco-Roman world, the king or emperor as sovereign occupied the supreme position. (2:13)

To administer affairs in the empire, the emperor appointed governors and sent them to the various regions under his dominion. As his representatives, governors could inflict punishment on wrongdoers and could praise, commend,

or honour persons who merited such for doing what was considered to be good or laudable. (2:14)

God's will for believers is that they be submissive to the authorities over them and maintain exemplary conduct. Their doing what is good can serve to silence the misrepresentations of senseless people who, in their ignorance, malign them. The respectful and laudable conduct of believers would expose the slanderous talk as being false. (2:15)

Believers are free, having been liberated from enslavement to sin and the condemnatory judgment it merits. The marvellous freedom they enjoy as God's approved children, however, is not to be abused and used as a cover for badness. Instead, proper use of freedom requires conduct that is consistent with their being "slaves of God," fully submitting themselves to his will and conforming to his upright ways. (2:16)

In their interactions with others, believers were to honour all persons, according them the dignity and respect that is owing to members of the human family. For the "brotherhood," the community of fellow children of God, they were to show love, the deep affection that exists in caring families. In keeping with his high station, the king or emperor had the right to be honoured. When showing honor to him, believers would have done so in harmony with their superior obligation to God and Christ. (2:17)

The Greek word *oikétes* designates a house slave or a personal servant in the household. Believers who were such slaves were to be submissive to their masters "in all fear," meaning with due apprehension of not wanting to displease them. It would have been easier for house servants to subject themselves to good and kindly, forbearing, humane, or reasonable masters. They were, however, also to submit themselves to the authority of masters who were harsh, unfair, or unscrupulous, patiently enduring mistreatment without lashing out and continuing to fulfil their duties conscientiously. (2:18)

Verses 19-20. Pilgrim conduct and suffering

Harsh masters might have made demands with which believing slaves would not have been able to comply with a good conscience. Their refusal to engage in dishonest or corrupt activity for their masters may have led to suffering for them. In that case, they could have drawn comfort from the fact that their enduring unjust suffering because of wanting to preserve a good conscience before God would be divinely favoured. (2:19)

The answer to the rhetorical question is that there would be no merit in a servant's enduring a beating for wrongdoing. But if believers suffered when doing what is good or right and endured the mistreatment in a noble manner, God would regard this with favor. (2:20; see the Notes section.)

“For to this you were called,” that is, called to a life of patiently enduring suffering for doing what is right, or of acting according to a godly conscience. Translators have variously rendered the introductory words. (2:21) “It is your vocation.” (REB) “After all, God chose you to suffer.” (CEV) “Indeed this is part of your calling.” (J. B. Phillips) “This is what you were called to do.” (NCV)

2:21-25. The believer's suffering and Christ's example

Verse 21a. The believer's call to suffering

Verses 21b-25. The example of Christ's suffering

That the calling or invitation to be God's approved people included having to endure suffering for doing what is right can be seen from what happened to Jesus Christ. He suffered mistreatment and, ultimately, an agonizing death by crucifixion, leaving believers an example of faithful endurance. As his disciples, they are to follow in his footsteps. (2:21)

Jesus Christ had done nothing to deserve being hit with fists, slapped, spit on, scourged, and subjected to a painful execution by crucifixion. He had remained without sin and no deceitful word ever came from his mouth. (2:22; compare Isaiah 53:9.)

When he was abused or slandered as one who was in league with the demons and as an imposter, a lawbreaker, and a blasphemer, he did not retaliate and revile those who insulted him. He did not threaten those who made him suffer but entrusted himself “to the one who judges righteously” or justly. He did not seek to avenge himself but confidently looked to his Father, the Supreme Judge, to right all matters. (2:23)

Jesus Christ took upon himself the full consequences for human sin so as to die for sinners, though he himself was without sin. In his own body, he bore our sins “on the timber [*xylon*].” The Greek term *xylon* basically means “wood” or “tree,” and refers to the implement on which the Son of God was crucified. Nailed to the timber, he bore the burden of our sins, making forgiveness possible on the basis of faith in the atoning value of his sacrificial death for us. Therefore, believers should no longer be living a life of sin but should “live to righteousness,” conducting themselves uprightly or in a manner that is

consistent with their having been forgiven of their sins and having become members of God's beloved family. (2:24)

By the "wound" (probably meaning the entire crucifixion process) inflicted on Jesus Christ, healing came to the believers. The healing that those addressed in Peter's letter and all other believers experienced was a healing from the deadly sickness of human sinfulness, for they ceased to be at enmity with God as condemned sinners. (2:24)

Formerly, believers had been like sheep that had gone astray. Without an approved relationship with God, they did not have his aid and guidance. So, like lost sheep, they found themselves in a pitiable and helpless state, pursuing a course in life that seemed hopeless and often proved to be injurious. Because of what Jesus Christ did in sacrificing his life for the human family, all who put faith in him ceased to be like straying sheep. They have been reconciled to God and have come under his loving care and protection. So they have returned to God, "the shepherd and guardian of [their] souls." In this case, "soul" can mean either the whole person or the individual's life. "Now you have returned to the one who is your shepherd and protector." (CEV) *Doch jetzt seid ihr zu dem zurückgekehrt, der als euer Hirte und Beschützer über euch* [footnote, *über eure Seelen; über euer Leben*] *wacht*. But now you have returned to him who watches over you [footnote, over your souls; over your life] as your shepherd and protector. (German, *Neue Genfer Übersetzung*) Like a shepherd, God will not fail to look after the interests of his sheep, his people, and will safeguard them. Moreover, believers have the care and help of his Son, the "chief shepherd." (2:25; 5:4)

Notes:

In fourth-century Codex Vaticanus, the word for "envies" (*phthónous*), in verse 1, is "murders" (*phonous*). The omission of the second letter theta (th) appears to be a copyist's error.

The word *logikós* is derived from *lógos*, meaning "word." On this basis, a number of translations read "milk of the word." (Darby, NASB, NKJV) The inclusion of the words "into salvation" (in verse 2) has the best manuscript support. There are, however, numerous manuscripts that omit these words.

In verse 3 of fourth-century Codex Sinaiticus, a corrector changed *ei* ("if") to *eíper*, meaning "if indeed," and so is more emphatic than *ei*. This reading is also found in numerous other manuscripts.

Certain translations, in verse 3, render the Greek word *ei* as “if” (“if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good” [NRSV]; “at any rate if you have tasted that the Lord is good” [NJB]; “so you will, if you have already tasted the goodness of the Lord” [J. B. Phillips]). Rendering *ei* as “if” can either mean that one’s having tasted the kindness of the Lord Jesus Christ is a condition for growing to salvation or that this is a condition for having a longing for the “true, unadulterated milk.”

In verse 5, the inclusion of the word *eis*, meaning “into,” before “holy priesthood” has the support of the oldest extant manuscripts. Many other manuscripts omit *eis*. This may have been an intentional omission to indicate that believers are already a holy priesthood and are not in the process of becoming such (being built up into a holy priesthood).

A number of manuscripts (in verse 16) read “friends of God,” not “slaves of God.”

Verse 19 could be literally rendered, “For this [is] favour, if someone because of conscience of God endures pains, suffering unjustly.” After “favour” (*cháris*), a number of manuscripts add *pará to theó*, which may be translated “in the sight of God” and would indicate that a slave’s enduring unjust treatment in a manner that honoured God would gain his favourable recognition. The manuscript reading that is best supported, however, does not include this addition. A number of translations, therefore, represent the individual’s being able to endure unjust treatment as the “grace” or “favour” or as an evidence thereof. “It is a sign of grace if, because God is in his thoughts, someone endures the pain of undeserved suffering.” (REB) “For whenever anyone bears the pain of unjust suffering because of consciousness of God, that is a grace.” (NAB)

Also in verse 19, the more difficult reading “through [that is, ‘because of’] conscience of God” (*diá syneídesin theoù*) has good manuscript support. Certain manuscripts read “good conscience” (instead of “conscience of God”), “good conscience of God” (*syneídesin agathén theoù*) or “conscience of [the] good God” (*syneídesin theoù agathén*).

The expression “conscience of God” likely applies to the individual’s preserving a good conscience before God. “A man does something valuable when he endures pain, as in the sight of God, though he knows he is suffering unjustly.” (J. B. Phillips) “God will bless you, even if others treat you unfairly for being loyal to him.” (CEV) A number of translations paraphrase the verse to refer to being conscious or aware of God or to having him in one’s thoughts. “You see, there is merit if, in awareness of God, you put up with the pains of undeserved punishment.” (NJB) “A person might have to suffer even when it is unfair, but if

he thinks of God and stands the pain, God is pleased.” (NCV) “For it is a credit to you if, being aware of God, you endure pain while suffering unjustly.” (NRSV)

In verse 20, there is no verb linked to “favor” or “grace,” and the context does not establish a definitive meaning for the wording of the Greek text (*toutó cháris pará theó*), which could be rendered, “this favor — in the sight of God.” Translations convey varying meanings (“this is a grace before God” [NAB]; “that is a sign of grace in the sight of God” [REB]; “God will bless you, even if others treat you unfairly for being loyal to him” (CEV); “you have God’s approval” [NRSV]; “then God is pleased” [NCV]; “you are doing something worthwhile in God’s sight” [J. B. Phillips]).

The best-supported reading in verse 21 is “for you; to you” (“Christ suffered for you; to you he left an example”). Other manuscripts say “for you; to us,” “for us; to you,” or “for us; to us.”

1 Peter 3:1-22

3:1-7. God’s pattern for wives and husbands

Verses 1-6. Pattern for wives

“Likewise,” or in a manner similar to the way believers were to subject themselves to governmental authorities and slaves to their masters, wives were to be submissive to their “own husbands.” In Greek, the term *anér* designates both a “man” and a “husband,” and so the addition of “own” makes it clear that a husband is meant. For a believing wife, her submission to her husband is governed by her relationship to God and Christ and the associated obligation to be exemplary in disposition, word, and deed. (3:1)

In the case of unbelieving husbands, the exemplary conduct of their wives could be instrumental in having them cease to be disobedient “to the word.” Without a “word,” or without the use of persuasive words or argumentation, the praiseworthy conduct of believing wives could help their husbands to put faith in the “word” or the message about Christ and become his disciples. (3:1) When unbelieving husbands are able to see with their own eyes that their wives have high regard (literally, “fear”) for them and are chaste or morally pure in their behavior, this can be more persuasive than many words in revealing the true worth of accepting the message about Christ and acting on it in faith. (3:2)

Believing wives were not to be focused on showy externals — adornment, impressive braiding of the hair, wearing of gold ornaments or garments that would attract the attention of others. (3:3) Instead, they were to be concerned

about their inner selves (the “hidden person of the heart”). Unlike fine attire that wears out in time, the beauty of the inner person that is reflected in the display of a “gentle” or unassuming and “quiet” or calm spirit or disposition never loses its attractiveness. It proves to be incorruptible adornment. Moreover, a woman’s gentle and calm spirit is of excelling value in God’s sight. (3:4)

Anciently, “holy women” who “hoped in God” adorned themselves with a gentle and calm disposition and were submissive to “their own husbands.” These women are referred to as “holy” on account of their living a life that was focused on being pleasing to God. They trusted in God, confident that hope based on his word of promise would be fulfilled. (3:5)

One of these “holy” or God-fearing women was Sarah. She “obeyed” her husband Abraham or subjected herself to his authority, leaving behind the more settled life in Ur and, for many years until her death, sharing with him a nomadic existence as a resident alien in the land of Canaan. Sarah had high regard for Abraham, “calling him lord.” The Genesis account contains only one reference to Sarah’s expressing herself in this way. She did so to herself and not in the hearing of others, indicating that she truly had the highest regard for her husband and his position as the head of the household that included hundreds of servants. The fact that Sarah referred to Abraham as lord in her own thoughts indicates that this must have been her regular practice and a reflection of her true feelings. Believing women prove themselves to be “daughters” of Sarah (praiseworthy godly women like Sarah) when they manifest the same disposition, doing what is good or upright and not giving in to any fear. They should not be terrified or become alarmed about any possible insult or hostility they might face because of being disciples of Jesus Christ. (3:6; Genesis 18:12, LXX)

Verse 7. Pattern for husbands

With reference to the role of husbands, the adverb *homoíos*, meaning “likewise,” indicates that husbands have obligations to fulfil in their relationship to their wives, just as wives are duty-bound to their husbands by reason of the marriage. Believing husbands are to live with their wives in a manner that accords with “knowledge.” This knowledge could include a husband’s full awareness of his wife’s capabilities, limitations, and likes and dislikes. In this context, knowledge would especially pertain to a husband’s recognition of his marital responsibilities as a servant of God and Christ, displaying the kind of love for his wife as Christ has for the community of believers and for which he surrendered his life. (3:7; Ephesians 5:25)

Believing husbands should accord honour to their wives, treating them in a dignified manner. The description of women as “weaker” vessels may relate to their not being as strong physically as men commonly are. So, in treating his wife honourably, a believing husband would be considerate of her limitations. To interpret the reference to a wife’s being a “weaker vessel” to include mental and moral inferiority would not fit the tenor of the directive for husbands to honor their wives. (3:7)

Moreover, believing husbands were to keep in mind that their wives had the same standing before God as they did, for their wives were co-heirs of the gracious “favour of life.” Believers, both men and women, have been granted a newness of life on the basis of their faith in Christ and his having surrendered his life for them. Their enjoyment of this newness of life as persons forgiven of their sins and reconciled to God as his beloved children is an expression of divine favour or unmerited kindness. The honour a believing husband would show to his wife would reflect his regard for her as a fellow child of God. This is essential so that a husband’s prayers would not be hindered but would continue to receive God’s favourable attention. A failure to honour his wife would make a believing husband guilty of dishonouring one of God’s beloved children. (3:7)

3:8-12. The believer’s suffering and harmonious living

Verses 8-11. Requirements for harmonious living

In their interactions with one another and unbelievers, believers have obligations besides being submissive to those who may have authority over them. These obligations are introduced with the expression *tó dé télos*, meaning “but finally” (literally, “but the end”) and apply to “all” believers. (3:8)

For believers to be “like-minded” requires avoiding whatever might give rise to disunity and bitter controversy. A harmonious spirit can be preserved when believers keep in mind that fellow believers are members of God’s beloved family and persons for whom Christ died. Their having sympathy or fellow feeling would especially be needed when others are suffering hardship or mistreatment for the sake of Christ. (Compare Hebrews 10:32-34.) As members of the family of God’s children, believers should have love for one another as evident from their being forgiving, not harbouring grudges, and being responsive to the needy ones among them. They should be compassionate, having strong feelings for those who may be suffering and being eager to do everything within their power to assist them. The Greek word for “compassionate” is *eúsplanchnos* and, literally, signifies “good bowels” and, by extension, the tender feelings that were associated with the inward parts. Being “humble-minded” would include being willing to serve others, putting their

interests ahead of one's own. It is the opposite of having an exalted view of oneself and wanting to be served instead of seeking to be active in serving. (3:8)

In the world, believers often faced misrepresentation and abuse. They were not to retaliate, seeking to "return evil for evil or reviling for reviling." Instead of attempting to get even for the injury that may have been done to them or countering insults by lashing out with abusive words, believers are called upon to bless. This does not mean that they would be commending those who treat them hatefully, but they would wish them well (not ill), sincerely desiring that they might change and come to be part of God's family. (3:9)

The calling of God is not one to a life characterized by a desire for retaliation but a life of love, compassion, and concern for others. So believers have been called to bless, to desire good for fellow humans. Their being true to their calling would result in inheriting a blessing or being the recipient of God's favor and approval. (3:9)

The quotation from Psalm 34:12-16 (33:13-17, LXX) supports the admonition not to retaliate and, aside from minor differences, corresponds to the reading of the extant Septuagint text. Loving life can denote having an appreciation for life, seeking to have a meaningful life that is more than mere existence and is focused on God and doing his will. Wanting to see or experience "good days" could relate to enjoying a purposeful life with his blessing. (3:10)

The individual who loves life and wants to see good days should cease from using his tongue to express "evil" and from speaking "deceit" with his lips. "Evil" would include cursing, slander, and abusive or degrading speech. Examples of deceit or treachery would be using flattery designed to entrap others, speaking half truths or lies, deliberately withholding vital information for the purpose of causing others to draw wrong conclusions, or in any other way misrepresenting matters. (3:10)

Besides keeping the tongue in check, all who love life should turn away from "evil," or everything that is morally corrupt and harmful to themselves and others. They should "do good" or whatever is kind, loving, and compassionate, maintaining exemplary conduct. To seek peace would mean to follow a course of life that contributes to maintaining a good relationship with God and fellow humans. Peace would be the goal that is earnestly pursued, shunning quarrels, strife, haughtiness, and anything else that can destroy a state of tranquility. (3:11)

Verse 12. Reason for harmonious living

One's shunning bad and doing good is governed by an awareness of God in all affairs of life, "for the eyes of the Lord" (YHWH, according to the Hebrew text) are "upon the righteous and his ears [are attentive] to their supplication." This indicates that he watches over the upright and is fully aware of their situation. They can be confident that he will aid them in their time of need, and their petitions in times of distress or adversity will not be in vain. (3:12)

3:13-17. Maintaining a good conscience under suffering

Verses 13-15. The way to a good conscience

"But the face of the Lord" (YHWH, according to the Hebrew text) is "against evildoers." This means that God himself is opposed to those who engage in corrupt practices and that he will hold an accounting against them. (3:12) The rhetorical question that follows serves to encourage pursuing a divinely approved course. "Who is the one who will injure you if you become zealous for what is good?" Under ordinary circumstances, no one would seek to hurt individuals because they are outstandingly helpful, kind, generous, considerate, and compassionate in their interactions with others. In view of the fact that believers often were the objects of mistreatment and misrepresentation, the question is more likely to denote whether anyone would be able to cause one real harm. The implied answer would be that no one could inflict permanent injury, for God is the one who will right all matters. (3:13)

If it should happen that believers suffer on account of righteousness or for having done what is right or divinely approved, they would be "fortunate" (*makários*). The Greek adjective *makários* describes an enviable state of well-being, happiness, or blessedness. Believers who patiently endure insult or abuse can have an inner joy and contentment because of having preserved a good conscience and knowing that their conduct is pleasing to God and Christ. (3:14)

The possibility of suffering for the right reasons, however, should not occasion fear. "But their fear you should not fear, nor be troubled." "Their fear" may denote the fear of hostile unbelievers because of the hateful things they might say or do. "Do not be afraid or terrified with fear of them." (NAB) Another possibility is that believers were not to be afraid of what unbelievers feared. "Do not fear what they fear." (NRSV) Unbelievers would have sought to resort to any means possible to avoid being subjected to mockery and mistreatment. Moreover, without a hope in the resurrection, they would have feared the possibility of having to face a violent death. The basic thought is that believers

were not to give in to fear or be thrown into a state of inner turmoil on account of becoming objects of hostility. (3:14)

When subjected to unjust treatment, sinful humans often look for opportunities to retaliate. Believers, however, were to “sanctify Christ as Lord in [their] hearts.” This would mean that, regardless of the circumstances, they, in their “hearts” or their inner selves, should accord Christ the honor as their Lord, letting his example and teaching govern their attitude and every aspect of their lives. Instead of yielding to fear and holding back from speaking up about their faith, believers were to be ready to make a defense (*apología*) before, or to provide an explanation to, anyone who might ask for an expression “about the hope in [them].” The Greek term *apología* can designate either a defense (as one might make before an official) or, in a more general sense, a reply given to an inquiry. (3:15)

A believer’s hope centres on God and Christ and includes confidence in the certainty of becoming a recipient of all the privileges and blessings that have been made possible through Christ and his laying down his life for humankind. This hope is “in” believers, for it fills them and is firmly established in their inmost selves. (3:15)

Verses 16-17. The result of a good conscience

When making a defence about their hope or responding to any inquiry regarding it, believers should do so “with gentleness and fear.” This would mean that their expressions would need to be made in a calm or courteous and respectful manner, not in a belligerent and arrogant way. Believers should be concerned about preserving a good conscience before God and fellow humans. Then, when insulted or maligned, they would be able to make the error of those who mistreated them evident. Persons guilty of having abused them for their “good conduct in Christ” might be put to shame. The exemplary conduct of believers as persons “in” or at one with Christ might make those who had spoken against them come to realize that they had seriously wronged them. (3:16)

It is better for one to suffer for doing good, “if the will of God desires it,” than for engaging in corrupt practices. Wrongdoing would merit punishment, and a believer’s failure to act uprightly would result in bringing reproach on God and Christ. The reference to the “will of God” does not mean that he wants believers to experience affliction. He may allow this to take place, and so it would be an expression of his permissive will. Whenever that might be the case, believers have the opportunity to demonstrate by their patient endurance the high value they place on being loyal disciples of God’s Son. Observers would be able to see the remarkable strength their faith has made possible. (3:17)

3: 18-22. Christ's example of triumph and encouragement

Verse 18. Christ's triumph over suffering

Believers are thus honoured to be like their Lord Jesus Christ. As the sinless one, he suffered, not for his own sins, but for the sins of others once for all. He, the "righteous one" who lived a sinless life and perfectly reflected his Father's purity in every way, endured insult, abuse, and a painful death for the "unrighteous," for sinful humans. His patient endurance of affliction served to bring humans to God. Through his excruciating death, Jesus Christ provided the means for humans to have their sins forgiven and to be reconciled to his Father as members of his family. He was "put to death in the flesh" but restored to life in the "spirit." Jesus Christ died while in the flesh, but he was raised to life, not in the flesh as a man, but in possession of life suited for the spiritual realm. In his glorified body, the Son of God is no longer subject to the limitations and weaknesses of the human body of flesh and blood. The contrasting parallel between flesh and spirit points to the distinct difference between Christ's nature as a man on earth and his nature as the immortal Son of God with life-giving power. (3:18)

Verses 19-20. Christ's encouragement in suffering

In the spirit, Jesus Christ preached to the "spirits in prison." This preaching is directly linked to his having been made alive in the spirit and so occurring after his resurrection. The "spirits in prison" are identified as having been disobedient in the days of Noah. The Genesis account (6:1-4) and comments in 2 Peter 2:4, 5, and Jude 6 indicate that "sons of God" or angels disobeyed by leaving their heavenly estate and taking up life as men with women on earth. Ancient Jewish writings that appear to have been regarded as authoritative in the first century CE and earlier do refer to these disobedient angels as spirits and indicate them to be in a state of confinement. In view of Jesus Christ's triumph over the powers of darkness by reason of his faithfulness to the death, he would have been in a position to express the ultimate judgments against the "spirits in prison." (3:19, 20)

In the days of Noah, God waited patiently, apparently with reference to executing judgment against the ungodly and did so until the construction of the ark for the preservation of human and animal life had been completed. A few humans, "eight souls" (Noah, his wife, their three sons Shem, Ham, and Japheth, and their wives), passed safely "through the water" of the deluge. (3:20)

Verses 21-22. Christ's triumph in providing salvation

The saving of eight humans as they passed “through the water” inside the ark is called an “antitype” (or a correspondency) of baptism, which is “now saving” believers “through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.” Baptism is not the “removal of the filth of the flesh.” Its purpose is not to effect a ceremonial cleansing from impurity as did the water of cleansing according to the provision set forth in the law of Moses. (Numbers 19:13-19) Baptism may be understood to be a “request” (*eperótema*) directed to God for a “good” or a clean conscience. It is the individual’s tangible outward expression of having repented from sins and put faith or trust in Christ and his sacrifice as God’s means for forgiveness of sins. The baptismal act may be regarded as a petition for the repentance to be accepted and the good conscience or the divinely approved standing to be granted. (3:21)

While the Greek word *eperótema* can designate an appeal or a request, it could also be understood to be a pledge made to God, a pledge or promise to be faithful and which the one getting baptized makes with a good conscience. Another possible significance is that the appeal to God originates from a good conscience. (3:21) These meanings are found in a number of translations. “Baptism that now saves you also — not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God.” (NIV) “It is the baptism corresponding to this water which saves you now — not the washing off of physical dirt but the pledge of a good conscience given to God.” (NJB) “Baptism is not the washing away of bodily impurities but the appeal made to God from a good conscience.” (REB)

That the Son of God is intimately involved in salvation or the deliverance from sin and the condemnation to which sin leads is indicated by the words “through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.” The resurrection confirmed that God had accepted his Son’s sacrificial death as the means by which humans could be forgiven of their sins and be saved from the associated condemnatory judgment. (3:21)

Subsequent to his resurrection, Jesus Christ entered heaven and is now at his Father’s right hand, representative of the position of the greatest honour, favour, and intimacy that he has been granted. In his highly exalted state of unparalleled honour or dignity, the Son of God has authority over all in heaven and on earth. “Angels and authorities and powers are subject to him,” for he is the King of kings and Lord of lords. His exaltation was made possible through the resurrection and also verified that the Father had accepted his Son’s sacrifice for humans, making it possible for them to be freed from sins and condemnation. (3:22)

Notes:

In the Greco-Roman world, highly respected women would have identified with the admonition (in verse 4) about attire and adornment. In the first century CE, the Roman statesman and philosopher Seneca, in a personal letter to his mother, praised her for not being impressed by jewels or pearls and for refusing to wear immodest clothing that would have “exposed no greater nakedness” upon being removed. He added, “your only ornament, the kind of beauty that time does not tarnish, is the great honour of modesty.”

A work attributed to a female Pythagorean philosopher of the fourth or third century BCE states that a woman should not wear transparent, ornate or silk clothes, but should dress modestly in white. Thus she would not appear overdressed or as a woman given to luxury and would avoid making other women envious. She should not adorn herself with gold or emeralds, for these are costly and manifest arrogance toward women of limited means.

The Jewish philosopher Philo (c. 20 BCE to c. 50 CE) drew a distinction between the public sphere of men and the private sphere of women, and he indicated that a respectable woman would not want to be seen “going about like a woman who walks the streets in the sight of other men.” (Special Laws, III, 169-171)

The Greek biographer and essayist Plutarch (c. 46 to c. 120 CE), in his *Advice to Bride and Groom*, observed that a wife should not “rely on her dowry or birth or beauty, but on things in which she gains the greatest hold on her husband, namely conversation, character, and comradeship, which she must render not perverse or vexatious day by day, but accommodating, inoffensive, and agreeable.” (141B) He referred to Crates who used to say, “adornment is that which adorns,” and that which adorns a woman makes her more decorous. This “is not gold or precious stones or scarlet,” but it is “whatever invests her with that something which betokens dignity, good behaviour, and modesty.” (141E)

In verse 7, fourth-century Codex Sinaiticus and a number of other manuscripts include the word *poikíles*, meaning “varied,” “diversified,” or “manifold,” before “favour of life.”

The reading “humble-minded” (a form of *tapeinóphron*), in verse 8, has the support of the oldest extant manuscripts and also others. Many later manuscripts say “well-disposed” or “friendly” (a form of *philóphron*). A number of manuscripts contain both Greek words.

According to the Septuagint the words quoted in verse 10 are in the form of a question, “Who is [the] man desiring life, loving to see good days?”

In verse 12, a number of manuscripts continue the quotation, adding regarding the evildoers, “to destroy them from the earth.”

According to the oldest manuscript evidence, “Christ” is the Lord mentioned in verse 15. Numerous later manuscripts, however, read “God” instead of “Christ.”

Various manuscript readings exist for verse 18, with certain ones indicating that Jesus “died” for sins and others saying that he “suffered” for sins. Other differences include the use of first person plural (“we” or “our”) and second person plural (“you” or “your”).

It appears that the expression “spirits in prison” (verse 19) is to be understood against the background of what is preserved in ancient sources, particularly 1 Enoch. There is evidence that this book was regarded as authoritative in the first century CE and earlier, as well as in later times. Among the Dead Sea Scrolls, there are twenty manuscripts of parts of 1 Enoch. Early Christian writers, including Irenaeus (in the second century CE), made use of this book. At the present time, however, only the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and the Ethiopian Jews (Beta Israel) accept 1 Enoch as part of the Scriptures.

In 1 Enoch 15:3-8, the angels who had “left the high, holy, and eternal heaven” and had taken wives for themselves from the “daughters of men” are called “spirits,” and their offspring, the giants, are referred to as having been “produced from the spirits and flesh.” According to chapter 12, verses 4 and 5, Enoch had the commission to declare judgment against the disobedient spirits, the “watchers of heaven” who had left the “high heaven.” The judgment message included, “You shall have no peace nor forgiveness of sin.” With apparent reference to this point in 1 Enoch, Irenaeus (*Against Heresies*, IV, 16, 2) wrote, “Enoch, too, pleasing God, without circumcision, discharged the office of God’s legate to the angels although he was a man.”

In 2 Enoch, thought to date from late in the first century CE, disobedient angels are depicted as being in confinement in the “second heaven.” They are said to be in a condition of “darkness, greater than earthly darkness” and “awaiting the great and boundless judgment.” (7:1)

One papyrus manuscript from about 300 CE (P72) omits the word “eight” in verse 20.

1 Peter 4: 1-19

4:1-6. Suffering and Christ's example for victorious living

Verses 1-2. The basis for victorious living

In the “flesh,” or as a human in a body of flesh, Christ suffered. Therefore, his disciples must likewise expect to be afflicted and should “arm” or prepare themselves with the same disposition he manifested when mistreated. Believers who suffer as did Jesus Christ for being loyal to him and his Father demonstrate that they have stopped living a life of sin. Their not continuing to sin as do persons who have no regard for God and Christ is the reason for their suffering as objects of the world's hostility. (4:1)

When desisting from sin, the believer reveals that he is determined to live the remainder of his life “in the flesh,” no longer for the “desires of men, but for God's will.” From the time of becoming Christ's disciples, believers should be making it their aim to live the rest of their life on earth in harmony with God's will and not according to the desires of men. The “desires of men” are the passions and cravings of sinful humans, desires that are out of harmony with the revealed will of God. (4:2)

Verses 3-6. The case against sinful living

The time that preceded their putting faith in Christ had been long enough for believers to have acted according to the “will of the nations,” or to have engaged in the base and corrupt practices characteristic of persons who are given to excesses and who lack moral restraint. When they had no relationship to God and his Son, they had lived in unbridled or licentious ways, yielded to wrong desires or lusts, indulged in drinking wine to an excess, participated in excessive feasting or revelries and drinking parties or carouses, and lawless, wanton, or unholy idolatries. The festivities associated with certain deities included unrestrained drinking, feasting, and sexual immorality. God-dishonoring practices were very much a part of social life in the Greco-Roman world. (4:3)

The Jewish philosopher Philo (c. 20 BCE to c. 50 CE), in his treatise against Flaccus (136), included the comment, “There are a vast number of parties in the city [Alexandria, Egypt] whose association is founded in no one good principle, but who are united by wine, and drunkenness, and revelry, and the offspring of those indulgencies, insolence.”

Persons among whom believers resided thought it strange that they had ceased “running” or sharing with them in their life of debauchery or dissipation and,

therefore, began to “blaspheme,” vilify, or speak abusively of them. (4:4) These puzzled maligners, however, would have to render an account for their abusive words. They would have to face God’s appointed judge, Jesus Christ, who stands “ready to judge the living and the dead.” (4:5; compare John 5:22, 23; 2 Timothy 4:1)

On the basis of passages in books other than 1 Peter, the “dead” to whom the evangel was proclaimed may designate persons who were “dead” on account of being sinners and so facing the condemnation to which sin leads. On becoming believers, they ceased to be dead in trespasses and passed from a state of death into life. (John 5:24, 25; Ephesians 2:4, 5; Colossians 2:13; 1 John 3:14) Because all humans must give an account to the one who will be judging the living and the dead, those dead in sins were granted the opportunity to hear the glad tidings and to avail themselves of the divine provision to be judged favourably. “According to men,” they might be judged with reference “to the flesh, but, according to God, they might live to the spirit.” (4:6)

No one is specifically identified as doing the judging with reference “to the flesh.” It could be those who wrongly judge believers from the outward appearance, and so the judgment would be “according to men,” or would be based on faulty human evaluation. Many have understood the expression “according to men” to mean that the judgment of those to whom the good news was declared is like that of all other humans insofar as the flesh or the physical organism is concerned. They die. To live “according to God to the spirit” could mean to live as he would want believers to live, guided by his spirit and in harmony with his will. (4:6)

Among the various interpretations relating to the identity of the dead are those that are based on the belief that rational spirits of the dead were in Hades, either in the favorable position of “Abraham’s bosom” or in a place of torment. There also have been those who equated the preaching to the dead to relate to that directed to the “spirits in prison” or to the spirits of those who perished in the flood. This view has little to commend it, for the word for “declare the evangel” in verse 6 of chapter 4 is a form of the verb *euangelízo*, which incorporates the noun meaning “evangel,” “good news,” or “glad tidings.” Good news was not proclaimed to the disobedient angels.

In verse 5, the mention of the dead applies to persons who are literally dead. For this reason, many believe that, in the next verse, one should likewise consider the reference to the dead to designate dead persons. This, however, is not necessarily the case. In John chapter 5, verses 24 and 25, Jesus spoke of those who passed from death to life upon heeding his word and believing the Father who had sent him. The “dead” who would hear Jesus’ words were living

persons, but were dead in sin. Thereafter the Son of God commented about those who were actually in the tombs but would be resurrected. (John 5:28, 29)

Nevertheless, numerous translations convey meanings that indicate the preaching to have been to those who were actually dead or to believers who had died since hearing the good news about Christ. This application to the literal dead has also resulted in a variety of renderings about living “to the spirit.” (4:6)

4:7-11. Judgment and service amidst suffering

Verse 7. Living in the light of coming judgment

“That’s why the good news was preached even to people who are now dead. Human judges said they were guilty as far as their bodies were concerned. But God set their spirits free to live as he wanted them to.” (NIRV) “For this is the reason the gospel was preached even to those who are now dead, so that they might be judged according to human standards in regard to the body, but live according to God in regard to the spirit.” (TNIV) “For also to the dead the message of salvation was declared. What they had done brought them — as to all humans — death. Their body had died, but God wanted that their spirit would live eternally.” (*Denn auch den Toten ist die Botschaft der Rettung verkündet worden. Was sie getan hatten, brachte ihnen — wie allen Menschen — den Tod. Ihr Körper war gestorben, aber Gott wollte, dass ihr Geist ewig lebt.* [German, *Hoffung für Alle*]). “Therefore the message was even preached to the deceased, so that, although their body was punished with death, they could nevertheless have eternal life in the spirit.” (*Deshalb wurde die Botschaft sogar den Verstorbenen gepredigt, damit sie — obwohl ihr Körper mit dem Tod bestraft wurde — trotzdem im Geist ewiges Leben haben können.* [German, *Neues Leben*]). “Therefore, it was namely also not in vain that the evangel was proclaimed to those of us who had died meanwhile. It was proclaimed to them, that now, according to God’s plan, they can lead a life in the spirit, even if they — as pertains to their earthly life — must die according to God’s judgment, as is the case with all humans.” (*Deswegen war es nämlich auch nicht umsonst, dass denen von uns, die inzwischen gestorben sind, das Evangelium verkündet wurde. Es wurde ihnen verkündet, damit sie jetzt nach Gottes Plan ein Leben im Geist führen können, auch wenn sie — was ihr irdisches Leben betrifft — nach Gottes Urteil sterben mussten, wie das bei allen Menschen der Fall ist* [German, *Neue Genfer Übersetzung*]).

Believers do not know just when Jesus Christ will return with power and splendor as King of kings and Lord of lords. So they need to live in expectation of the climax of the age and what that would mean for them. It is with a sense of immediacy and with confidence in the certainty of the coming “end of all

things” that believers perceive this end as having drawn near. The realization that it could come at any time has a direct bearing on how they should be living their lives. They should be sensible, sound in mind, or use good judgment in conducting their affairs of life, maintaining their focus on being in an approved condition before God and Christ. This would require that they be diligent about working to care for their needs, not becoming idlers because of a distorted view about the nearness of the end. (4:7; compare 1 Thessalonians 4:11, 12; 2 Thessalonians 3:6-12.)

Moreover, their living with the realization that the “end of all things has drawn near” would call for being sober, alert, watchful, or vigilant, not succumbing to a state of drowsiness when it comes to discharging their responsibilities as disciples of Jesus Christ. This would include responding compassionately to the needs of others. (4:7)

When believers live their lives in a manner that reflects sound judgment and sobriety or alertness, they are serious about praying because of recognizing their continued need for aid and guidance. A literal rendering of the admonition would be, “Be sensible, therefore, and be sober for prayers.” The expression “for prayers” (literally, “into prayers”) appears to denote that being sensible and sober or alert are prerequisites for acceptable prayer. (4:7) Translators have variously rendered the admonition. “Therefore to help you to pray you must lead self-controlled and sober lives.” (REB) “So think clearly and control yourselves so you will be able to pray.” (NCV) “So be serious and be sensible enough to pray.” (CEV) “You must be the boss over your mind. Keep awake so you can pray.” (NLB) “Therefore be sober-minded and temperate, so that you may give yourselves to prayer.” (Weymouth) “Therefore be clear minded and self-controlled so that you can pray.” (NIV) “Therefore be serious and discipline yourselves for the sake of your prayers.” (NRSV)

Verse 8-11. Serving in the spirit of love

“Above all,” or of greatest importance, believers needed to have love for one another, a love that was not restricted but all-embracing and constant (*ektenés*). The Greek word *ektenés* conveys the thought of being earnest, fervent, or unwavering. Individually, believers are subject to human failings. So within the community of believers, all need to be forbearing and willing to forgive transgressions. Love makes this possible, “for love covers many sins.” When sins are forgiven, they are covered or completely banished from sight. (4:8; compare Proverbs 10:12.)

In Greek, the word for being hospitable (*philóxenos*) denotes having love or affection for strangers. So the hospitable person recognizes a stranger as

someone in need of being welcomed and responds in a loving manner. Not infrequently believers suffered from persecution, being deprived of their homes and possessions. Other adversities also plunged individuals into poverty. Additionally, there were believers who travelled to different locations, often as representatives of congregations. Some were apostles of congregations, and others represented apostles. Fellow believers would open their homes to needy ones and those who came from other areas, providing them with food and lodging. For those who extended hospitality, this could have resulted in their being inconvenienced or experiencing a measure of stress. Therefore, believers were admonished to be hospitable “without grumbling,” not complaining about what might be perceived as an imposition or a burden. (4:9)

The community of believers is a household or a family of faith. Within that household, individuals have specific gifts or endowments. Each possessor of a gift is said to have received it. So the gift is an endowment from God. Its possessor had the obligation to use it to serve fellow members in the household of faith, doing so as would “good stewards of the varied favour of God.” The variety of gifts that God has granted are an expression of his gracious favor or unmerited kindness, and so the proper use of the specific gift would have been in keeping with the position of a steward, a servant entrusted with responsibilities to be discharged for the benefit of the household of which he himself was a member. (4:10)

If the gift proved to be “speaking,” teaching, encouraging, admonishing, or consoling, the speaking was to be done in a way that revealed God as its source. The individual should have spoken in a manner appropriate for one who was speaking the words of God and so functioning merely as his serviceable instrument. If one’s gift was to minister or to render service to fellow believers in response to their needs, this was to be done with full reliance on God to supply the essential strength for fulfilling the required tasks. (4:11)

In keeping with this admonition, the possessors of the gifts would have minimized their own role so that God might be “glorified in everything through Jesus Christ.” All the credit for activity that benefited the community of believers would have been given to God. This would have been done “through Jesus Christ,” for believers are his disciples and look to him for guidance and aid in discharging the trust that has been committed to them. The Father is the one who granted the capacity and the strength for individuals to serve. Rightly, then, to him is to be ascribed “the glory [honour or praise] and might [as the ultimate source of strength] for ever and ever [literally, ‘into the ages of the ages’]. Amen [So be it].” (4:11)

4:12-19. The Lord's return and trials

Verses 12-14. The source of courage for trials

In the Greco-Roman world, numerous gods and goddesses were worshiped, and the established rituals associated with these deities did not result in persecution to those who engaged in them. Those who became disciples of Jesus Christ, however, found themselves in the position of persons who were no longer accepted in the community as they had been when they practiced their previous forms of worship. So it must have been puzzling to them that their having adopted a way of life that was based on love for others made them objects of hatred. Peter commented on this, directing his words to fellow believers as “beloved ones.” He told them not to consider it strange that a trial as by fire (literally, a “fire toward trial” or “test”) had occurred among them, that a “strange thing” had befallen them. (4:12)

Translators have variously rendered the expression “fire toward trial” as “fiery ordeal that is taking place among you to test you” (NRSV), “fiery ordeal which has come to test you” (REB), “fiery ordeals which come to test your faith” (J. B. Phillips), “terrible trouble which now comes to test you” (NCV), “testing that is like walking through fire” (CEV), and “a trial by fire” (NAB). The suffering of believers seemingly proved to be like a refiner’s fire that tested their faith in and devotion to God and Christ. Like the fire of a refiner, the distress and hardships served to purify them, contributing to their having a stronger faith, greater sympathy for others who suffer and a better understanding of their plight, and an enhanced appreciation of the importance of relying on God and Christ for strength to endure and for the help that comes to them by means of the holy spirit. Believers were suffering for what was right and good, making their painful ordeals seem strange to them. Still, the trials were to be expected, for they were living among those who were in a state of alienation from God. (4:12)

Instead of becoming despondent on account of the distress and hardship they were facing, believers could rejoice in being able to share in the “sufferings of the Christ.” This could mean that, by enduring affliction for living a life that honoured God, they were undergoing the same kind of sufferings that Christ did and so were sharing with him in the same experience. Another possible meaning is that Christ regards the suffering of his disciples as his own, making the painful experiences of believers a participation in Christ’s suffering. The rejoicing of his disciples would be because of the honor associated with being a participant in his sufferings, the sufferings of their Lord who died for them. (4:13)

Faithful endurance of suffering for being devoted to God and Christ would also result in future rejoicing. At the “revelation of the glory” of the Son of God, his disciples would have reason to rejoice exultingly. This revelation designates the time when Jesus Christ is to return in all his glory or splendor as the King of kings and Lord of Lords and when believers are to be united with him, to enjoy a never-ending relationship with him and his Father as sinless persons. The realization of their God-given hope will then result in unparalleled rejoicing. (4:13)

In view of the honour of being able to share in the sufferings of the Christ and in the incomprehensibly great future joy at the time when he returns in glory, believers have good reason to consider themselves fortunate when they are reproached, reviled, maligned, or vilified for “the name of Christ.” They can be “happy” or experience an inner sense of joy and well-being because of suffering for his name, that is, for suffering because of being identified as belonging to him. Additionally, believers can have a sense of joy and well-being because, when they suffer for belonging to Christ, “the [spirit] of glory, the spirit of God” (or “God’s spirit of glory”) is resting upon them. While humans alienated from God treat them with contempt, persecuted believers are honored by having his spirit upon them, aiding them to endure and to manifest the patient endurance that brings praise to him and his Son. If they were not divinely approved, God’s spirit would not be upon them. So, with the spirit “of glory” resting upon them, they are identified as divinely approved and thus the reproach they bear is transformed into glory, splendour, honour, or dignity. (4:14)

Verses 15-19. Courage for trials and Christian duty

In order to continue to have God’s spirit resting upon them, individual believers need to be determined not to suffer for the wrong reasons, for being a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or a meddler in the affairs of others (*allotriepískopos*). The Greek designation *allortiepískopos* is a compound that could mean an “overseer of what belongs to someone else” and so could apply to a busybody or a person who meddles in the affairs of others. Some have concluded that the Greek term here must denote a more serious wrong, one comparable to the others that are mentioned. Possibilities that have been suggested are “one who hides stolen property,” a “spy,” or an “informer.” Translators have variously rendered the Greek word as “intriguer” (NAB), “mischief maker” (NRSV), “informer” (NJB), “spy” (J. B. Phillips), “busybody” (CEV), and “meddling in other people’s business.” (REB) There is a possibility that “busybody” or “meddler” is the intended significance. Believers, based on what they had come to know about right conduct, may have been tempted to tell others how they should be running their affairs. Their doing so could easily have angered those who

disapproved of their unsolicited advice or their censures, resulting in abusive or even violent responses. Regardless of how a particular word may be understood, the basic thought is that believers should not be conducting themselves in a manner that would merit disapproval or punishment. (4:15)

If, however, believers suffered as “Christians,” persons who belonged to Christ as his followers, they “should not be ashamed but glorify God in this name.” When subjected to suffering for belonging to Christ, believers glorify God or honor him by maintaining their faith and patiently enduring the affliction while relying on him to strengthen and sustain them by means of his spirit. There is no reason for shame because of being called “Christian” or being identified with Christ. While unbelievers may have used the designation when speaking contemptuously of believers, the believer, as a person to whom the name Christian was applied, could glorify or honour God. (4:16)

It appears that the suffering of believers is viewed as pointing to the certainty of deliverance for them, the deliverance or salvation being expressed in terms of imminence. Therefore, the “time for the judgment to begin with the house of God” seems to be spoken of as being at hand. Although not in the Greek text, the verb in the present tense is implied (“for [it is] the time”). Judgment can have both a favourable and an unfavourable outcome. For faithful members of the “house” or “household of God,” the time for judgment would be a time for being united with Christ as God’s approved children. Any among them who proved to be unfaithful would be judged adversely. Since the judgment first starts with believers, what would be the “end of those who disobey the evangel of God?” The “evangel of God” is the good news about Christ, and is the message that has God as the ultimate source. One’s disobeying the good news constitutes rejecting its source, God, and so merits his adverse judgment. Accordingly, for the disobedient ones, the end or outcome would be condemnation. (4:17)

Evidently because of the afflictions and hardships believers experience, they, as upright ones, are referred to as being saved with difficulty. Their ultimate salvation, complete deliverance from sin, requires vigorous exertion in conducting themselves in a divinely approved manner in whatever circumstances they might find themselves, always relying on God and Christ for strength to endure trials. This raises the question, “Where will the impious and sinner appear?” The answer to this rhetorical question is that godless ones and those who live a life of sin will not make a favorable appearance before God. (4:18; see Proverbs 11:31, where the identical thought is expressed in the Septuagint.)

In view of the certainty of the impartial judgment of all, suffering believers need to be concerned about enduring faithfully and continuing to conduct themselves in a divinely approved manner. To this end, they need God's help. So, while experiencing suffering "according to the will of God," or because he may permit it, the afflicted believers need to commit "their souls," or themselves, to him, the "faithful Creator," while continuing to do what is good. As the "faithful Creator," God is completely dependable and will never fail to strengthen and sustain his people in their time of distress. Believers commit themselves to him when they confidently look to him for aid, continuing to petition him in faith to help them in their time of need and to avoid yielding to any desire to repay evil to those responsible for causing them pain. (4:19)

Notes:

With reference to Christ's suffering (in verse 1), numerous manuscripts add either "for us" or "for you."

In verse 5, the one to whom the account is to be given is not specifically identified. There is a possibility that God is here being referred to as the ultimate judge who will be acting through his Son, the judge whom he has appointed.

Many manuscripts, in verse 14, add "and power" after "glory." Then, at the end of this verse, numerous manuscripts add, "indeed according to them, he is blasphemed; but according to you, he is glorified."

1 Peter 5:1-14

5:1-5. The Lord's return and daily duty

Verses 1-4. Duty of the elders

Elders, capable men by reason of their age, experience, and exemplary conduct, looked after the welfare of fellow believers and taught the word of God. Peter directed his admonition to them as a "fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ." He thus identified himself as serving in the same capacity and as being fully aware of their weighty responsibilities. His calling attention to his having been a witness of Christ's suffering added solemnity to the exhortation and would have reminded the elders that they also would undergo suffering as they ministered to fellow believers and might even face death for their faithful service. (5:1)

Peter spoke confidently about being a sharer in the "glory about to be revealed." This revelation would occur when Jesus Christ returns as the King of kings and Lord of lords in glory or royal dignity. Not knowing just when this would be,

Peter referred to it with a sense of immediacy, saying regarding it, “about to be revealed.” He did not doubt the certainty of Jesus Christ’s return. Sharing in Christ’s glory would mean being united with him as sinless members of his Father’s family of approved children. (5:1)

Peter then continued with the admonition directed to fellow elders. (5:1) Like faithful shepherds, elders were to care for the “flock of God,” looking out for the welfare of fellow believers. The believers in the various towns and cities of Asia Minor to whom Peter’s letter had been sent belonged to God, for they had been purchased with the priceless blood of his unique Son. This called for the elders to treat fellow believers as persons who were precious to God. (5:2; see the Notes section.)

In carrying out their function of oversight, they were not to do so as would persons who are forced to perform a task, but they were to do so “willingly” as would eager volunteers. Numerous manuscripts add, “according to God.” This may mean that the willing service of the elders would be performed in a manner that God approved. Translations that include a rendering for “according to God” variously read, “as God would have you do it” (NRSV), “in order to please God” (CEV), and “as God would have it” (NAB, REB). In the community of believers, elders were to guard against using their position for “dishonest gain.” The Greek adverb *aischrokerdós* is descriptive of someone who would be shamelessly greedy for gain or material profit. A desire for such gain would be the very opposite of what the apostle Paul said to fellow elders about his own service, “I coveted no one’s silver or gold or clothing. You know for yourselves that I worked with my own hands to support myself and my companions.” (Acts 20:33, 34, NRSV) Instead of seeking gain, elders were to minister to the needs of others eagerly. Exemplary elders would be givers, not takers. They would be deeply concerned about the welfare of fellow believers. (5:2)

The community of believers is referred to as “portions” (the plural of *kléros*). This could mean that the “flock of God” as a whole is considered as consisting of parts or portions in the various towns and cities where believers lived, and that the elders in those respective places had a portion or an allotment of the flock to care for. The term *kléros* has been rendered “those allotted to your charge” (NASB), “people you are responsible for” (NCV), “sphere of responsibility” (*Verantwortungsbereich*, German *Gute Nachricht Bibel*), “assigned portion” (*Zugewiesene*, Schlachter’s German translation). Elders were not to lord over those whom they served, assuming the role of masters over them and issuing commands, but they were to lead by being examples to God’s flock. (5:3)

The “chief shepherd” is Jesus Christ. At the time he appears or returns as the highly exalted King and Judge, elders who had faithfully served in looking after the welfare of fellow believers would receive the “unfading crown of glory.” This “crown” would denote Christ’s approval for their having discharged their responsibilities in faithfulness. They, like other devoted believers, would be rewarded with the enjoyment of life in the sinless state and share in all the divinely promised benefits and blessings. Unlike the victory wreaths consisting of leaves and with which athletes were crowned, the crown faithful elders would receive does not fade or wilt. They would be granted Christ’s approval and eternal life, the real life distinguished by the enjoyment of a never-ending relationship with him and his Father. (5:4)

Verse 5. Duty of the young

The introductory “likewise” (*homoíōs*) resumes the previous discussion about subjection. Just as subjection was involved in the relationship of believers to governmental authority, house servants to their masters, wives to their husbands, so younger men were to submit to older men, showing respect for them (as they would their own fathers) and listening to their sound admonition. (1 Timothy 5:1) The Greek term for those who served as elders in the community of believers and for older men is the same. The specific reference to “younger men” would suggest that the older men were older ones in the common sense of the word. (5:5)

Peter followed up his exhortation to younger men with admonition applicable to all believers. As part of the family of God’s beloved children, all believers should clothe (*enkombóomai*) themselves with humility or lowliness. The Greek term *enkombóomai* is a compound that includes the word *kómbos*, meaning “band,” and so refers to something that one ties on. With humility fastened to themselves, believers would be willing to serve one another, doing everything possible to respond to needs. Thus they would be conducting themselves in harmony with Proverbs 3:34 (LXX), God “opposes the haughty, but grants favor to the lowly.” To extend his gracious favor or his unmerited kindness, which includes his aid and guidance, God turns his attention to the lowly who seek his help and who are willing to serve others. He stands in opposition to all who arrogantly lift themselves above others and want to dominate and to be served. (5:5)

5:6-11. The Lord's return and Christian maturity

Verses 6-9. Developing maturity

“Therefore,” or because God opposes the haughty, believers should want to humble themselves under his “mighty hand.” This would mean submitting to whatever may take place by his permission, manifesting patience when experiencing distress or hardship. Then the very “hand” under which believers humble themselves will, “in time,” exalt them. Exaltation would include being honoured as God’s approved servants who have faithfully endured trials. (5:6)

When faced with affliction or hardships, believers need to cast their “anxiety,” care, or concern on God, not giving in to unsettling worry but trusting in his loving concern and the strengthening aid he provides by means of his spirit. Never will our heavenly Father fail to sustain and strengthen us in our times of difficulty, for he cares for us. (5:7)

Committing one’s concerns and cares to God does not mean becoming complacent or indifferent, but involves active cooperation with the guidance he provides through his spirit. This is essential because the adversary, the devil, is prowling about like a roaring lion, seeking victims. So there continues to be a need for one to be “sober” or alert and “vigilant” or watchful, not permitting the adversary to find an opening for leading one into a path contrary to God’s will. (5:8)

Believers need to resist the devil, remaining firm in the faith. This requires that they not give in to any doubts about God’s love and concern for them and his desire to sustain and strengthen them by means of his spirit. Peter reminded those to whom he wrote to recognize that the entire community of believers, the whole “brotherhood” in the world, experienced the “same sufferings.” All the other believers faced affliction on account of being disciples of Jesus Christ. They suffered for the right reasons. The awareness that their circumstances were not unique would have aided believers in Asia Minor to remain loyal to God and Christ, confident that they would be divinely aided to endure whatever trials might come their way. (5:9)

Verses 10-11. Enjoying maturity

All suffering would prove to be temporary. Especially in relation to eternity, the time of distress would be but a “little while.” The “God of all favour, who called [believers] to his eternal glory in Christ Jesus” would “restore [*katartízo*], support [*sterízo*], strengthen [*sthenóō*], and establish [*themelióō*] them after the short time of suffering had passed. (5:10)

The heavenly Father is the “God of all favor,” for he is the source of all the gracious favour or unmerited kindness in the form of guidance and aid that believers need. The greatest expression of his gracious favour was sending his Son to the earth, making it possible for humans to be forgiven of their sins and reconciled to him as beloved children. God did the calling or inviting through the proclamation of the good news about his Son, which message included how humans can become his approved children. Believers were called to be sharers in “his eternal glory.” This glory would be enjoyed in the never-ending sinless state as persons perfectly reflecting the image of God, or the glorious person who he is in love, justice, and all his other admirable attributes. The “glory” is “in Christ Jesus,” for it is by coming to be at one with him that believers become sharers in it. (5:10)

God will cause all the suffering that believers may experience to work out for their good. The Greek word *katartízo* can mean “restore,” “make complete,” or “prepare.” In this context, it could relate to being restored or made whole as would be a person who is trained to function well for a particular purpose. *Sterízo* conveys the sense of supporting, confirming, establishing, or making firm or unmovable. *Sthenóo* denotes “to make strong” or “to strengthen.” In its basic sense, *themelióo* relates to laying a foundation and so can refer to establishing or providing a sure basis. All four Greek terms make it clear that God will act to aid believers to be fully approved after all their trials have passed. (5:10)

Restoring or making whole, supporting or making firm, strengthening, and establishing require power or might. God is the ultimate source of strength, and it is ascribed to him in the prayerful expression, “To him [be] the might forever [literally, ‘into the ages’]. Amen [So be it].” (5:11)

5:12-14. Concluding salutation

Verse 12. Personal testimony

Peter did not personally write the letter. He did so “through Silvanus the faithful brother.” Silvanus is the same as Silas, the Christian prophet who accompanied the apostle Paul. This was after Paul and Barnabas parted ways subsequent to a dispute about having Mark as a travelling companion. (Acts 15:22-40; 18:5; 2 Corinthians 1:19; 1 Thessalonians 1:1; 2 Thessalonians 1:1) Like Paul, Silvanus (Silas) was a Roman citizen. (Acts 16:19-37) Peter’s considering Silvanus as a “faithful brother” may be understood to mean that he regarded him as completely trustworthy or dependable. Another possibility would be that Silvanus was a man of faith, fully devoted to God and Christ. (5:12)

The letter is comparatively short, and Peter spoke of having written through Silvanus “through few,” that is, with a few words or with a few lines. Peter expressed his purpose for writing to have been to provide encouragement, consolation, or exhortation and to testify that “this is the true favour of God, in which [believers should] stand.” The reference to “this” being “the true favour of God” may be variously understood. If the “this” relates specifically to the letter, it could apply to the matters about which he wrote and which were designed to encourage and strengthen them to endure their suffering in faithfulness to the end. Another possibility is that the affliction believers were experiencing constituted an expression of God’s true favour because of the benefits that would follow. It could also be that the focus is on the message that had been proclaimed to them about Jesus Christ and the significance of his sacrificial death, and that Peter added his confirmatory witness to this incomprehensibly great expression of God’s true favour. It is in the true favour of God that believers needed to stand firmly, not wavering in their confidence in his love and concern for them. (5:12)

Verse 13-14. Final greetings

The letter closes with greetings from “the [one] in Babylon, a fellow chosen [one], and Mark,” whom Peter called “my son.” The “fellow chosen one” in Babylon is in the feminine gender, and this is why some have thought Peter was speaking of his wife, but this would be a very unusual way of including his wife’s greetings and does not seem to be a likely explanation. The one in Babylon is generally understood to mean the community of believers, which community (in a collective sense) would be a fellow chosen one (called by God to be his own). Many translations make this significance explicit (“greetings from your sister church in Babylon” [REB]; “greetings from the Lord’s followers in Babylon” [CEV]; “the church in Babylon, who was chosen like you” [NCV]). In view of his close association with the younger man Mark (the cousin of Barnabas and the son of Mary who had a home in Jerusalem), Peter referred to him affectionately as “my son.” (5:13; Acts 12:12; Colossians 4:10)

The kiss with which believers were to greet one another is, according to many manuscripts, a “kiss of love” or a “loving kiss.” This kiss would be an expression of their love for one another as members of the same family of God’s children. (5:14)

“Peace” is the sense of calmness and tranquillity that comes from knowing that one can rest assured of divine compassionate care, concern, and aid. The letter concludes with the prayerful wish that “all” who are “in Christ,” or at one with him as members of his body, have this peace. (5:14)

Notes:

In verse 1, numerous manuscripts include “therefore” (*oun*) after “elders.” The connection with the preceding discussion is not readily apparent. Possibly the thought is that elders need to keep in mind their accountability to God and Christ when carrying out their responsibilities. As members of God’s household, they are included among those with whom the judgment begins. (4:17)

In verse 2, the Greek verb for “overseeing” (a form of *episkopéo*) is missing in fourth-century Codex Vaticanus and a number of other manuscripts.

All of verse 3 is missing in fourth-century Codex Vaticanus.

Numerous manuscripts (in verse 6) add *episkopés* after “time,” thus identifying the time as being one for visitation.

With reference to what the devil is seeking (verse 8), manuscript readings differ (“someone to devour”; “whom he should devour”; “to devour”). According to studies of lions conducted in recent years, one reason male lions roar is to identify ownership of their territory, and they will aggressively confront, drive out, or attack any intruding roaring male challenger. So a roaring lion can be a potential threat, and that is always true of the adversary, the devil.

In verse 10, the object of the call is either “you” or “us,” depending on which manuscript reading is being followed. The reading “you” has the best manuscript support. Also in verse 10, numerous manuscripts do not include “Jesus” after “Christ.” Another variant in this verse is the omission of either *sthenósei* (“strengthen”) or *themeliósei* (“found” or “establish”).

In verse 11, numerous manuscripts include the word *dóxa* (“glory”) before or after *krátos* (“might”). While some manuscripts, including P72 (c. 300 CE) and fourth century Codex Vaticanus, read “into the ages” or “forever,” many other manuscripts read “into the ages of the ages” or “forever and ever.”

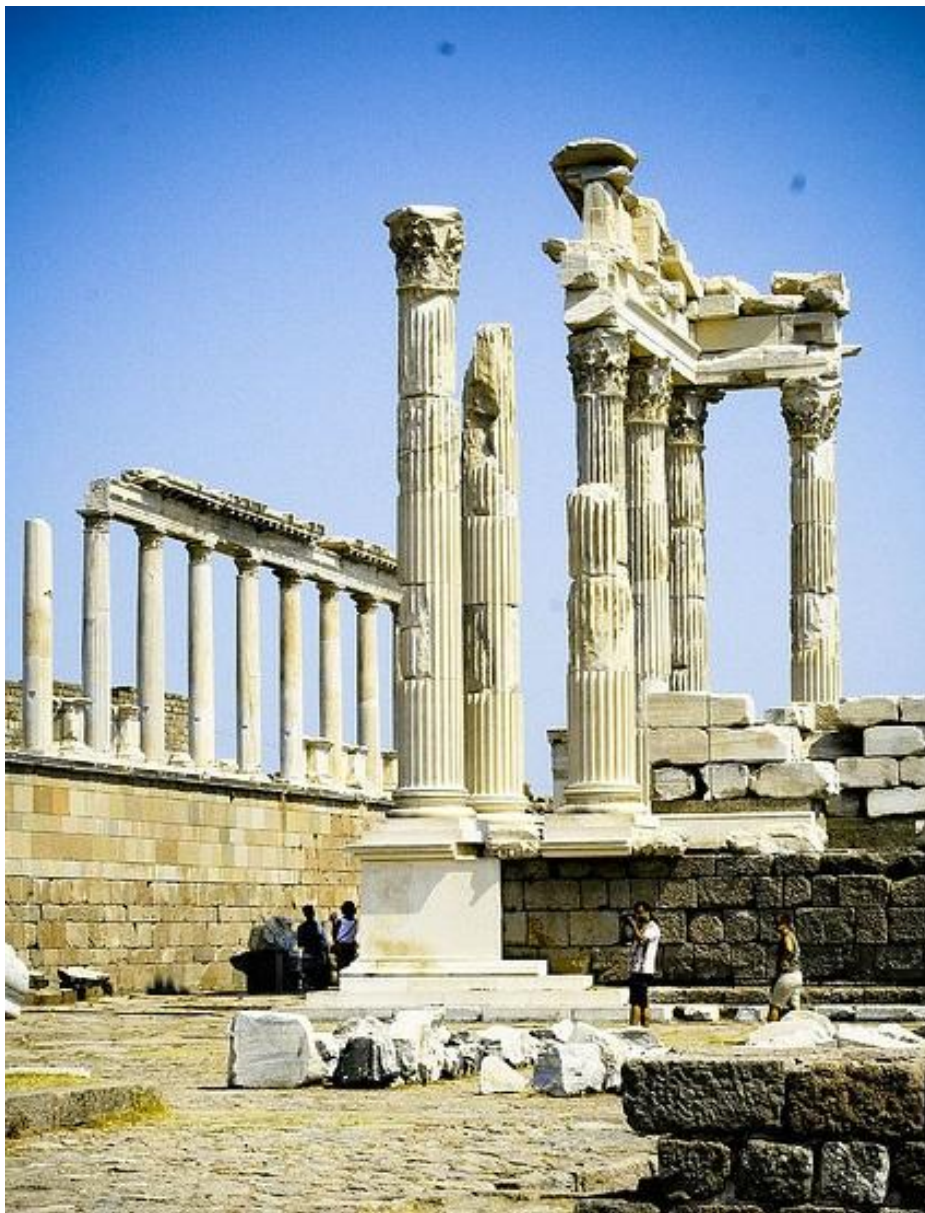
In verse 13, one eleventh-century manuscript (2138) and a few others read “Rome” instead of “Babylon,” reflecting an interpretive scribal alteration.

Instead of “kiss of love” (in verse 14), a few later manuscripts read “holy kiss.”

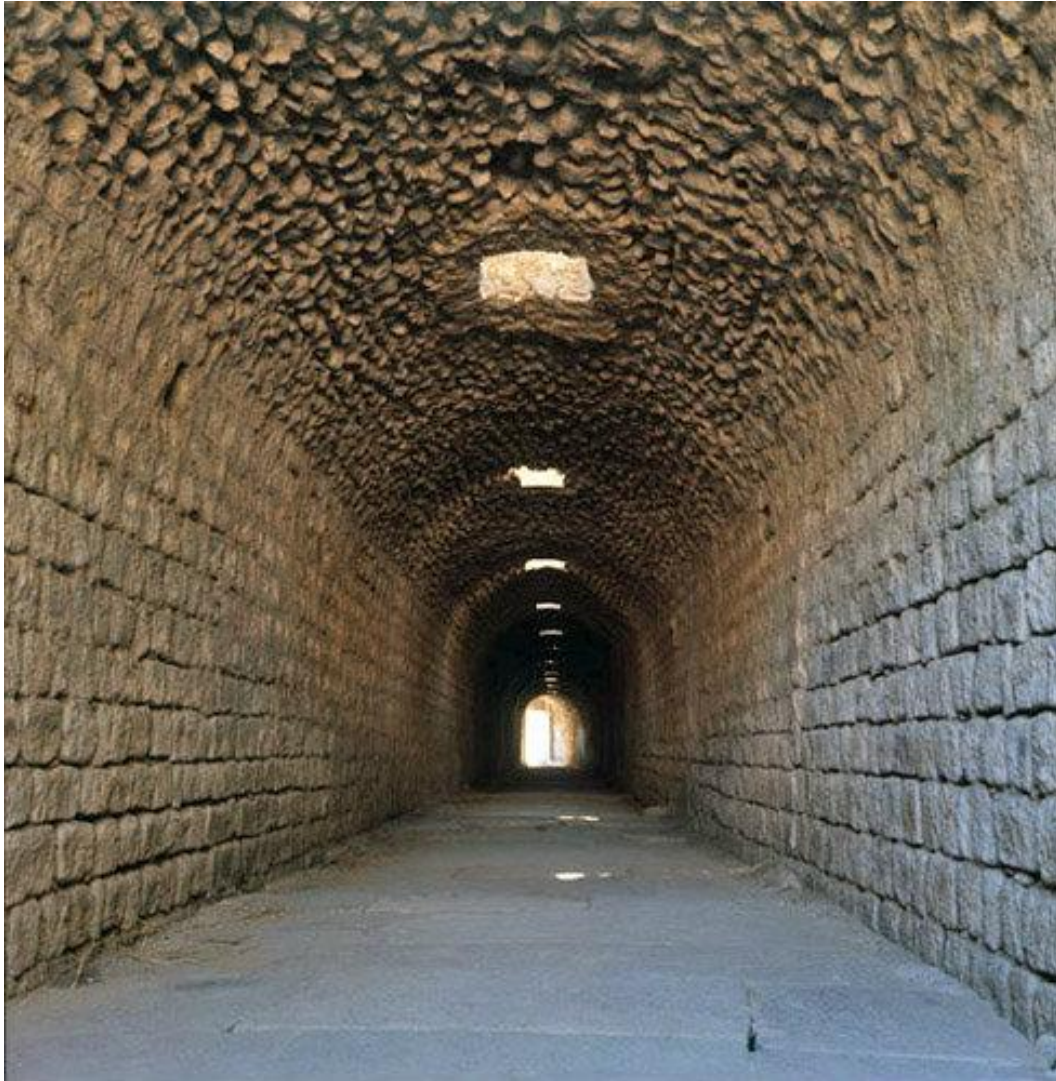
The concluding prayerful expression that starts with “peace” is missing in P72 (c. 300 CE). “Amen” (“so be it”) appears at the conclusion of many manuscripts.

1 Peter - Questionnaire – Examination

1. Study the person, life, and work of Christ as portrayed in this Epistle.
2. Note correspondences between Peter's life and speeches and his teaching in this Epistle.
3. What light is thrown on the problem of suffering and its relation to the suffering of Christ?
4. Compare the passage 2:4-10 with Psalm 68:22; Isaiah 8:14; Isaiah 28:16; and Matthew 16:18. What inferences can be drawn from the comparison?
5. What lines of Christian conduct, as set out in Romans chapters 12 and 13, find an echo in this Epistle?



Ruins of the Acropolis, Pergamum, in Asia minor



The Sacred Tunnel in the Asclepium, Pergamum, where the cult of Asclepios the Saviour was practised.

Peter's Second Letter

2 Peter 1:1-21

1:1-4. The basis of Christian growth

Verses 1-2. The common faith of believers

The salutation identifies “Symeon [Simon, according to other manuscripts] Peter, a slave and apostle of Jesus Christ,” as the source for 2 Peter. In the capacity of a “slave” or servant, he was accountable to the Lord Jesus Christ in discharging his commission as an apostle, a disciple who had been specially “sent forth” to bear witness concerning him. Furthermore, being a “slave” of

Jesus Christ was an unparalleled honour, for it signified belonging to him as his approved servant. No greater dignity could be granted to any human than to be in the service of the Son of God and, therefore, also in the service of his Father. (1:1)

Second Peter is not directed to any specific group of believers living in a certain area. It appears to have been intended for believers generally, to those who “have obtained [*lancháno*] a faith in the righteousness of our God and of [the] Saviour Jesus Christ.” (1:1)

The Greek verb *lancháno* denotes to receive something by lot and could, in this context, signify to obtain by God’s will. The “faith” specifically centres on Christ, the surrender of his life for the human family, and what his Father accomplished through him. It is a “faith” that all believers share in common, being equal in respect the Sacred Tunnel in the Asclepium nor with the apostles (literally “ours”) or with believing Jews as was Peter. It is a faith that is of like preciousness as that of Peter and so of no lesser value than his. (1:1)

The phrase “in the righteousness” has commonly be translated “through the righteousness” and could indicate that the faith of believers has come into the possession of all equally on account of the righteousness, justice, fairness, or impartiality of God and Christ. The Greek preposition *en* (“in”) could also be understood to signify “in the sphere” of divine “righteousness” or of impartial treatment. This faith came into the possession of believers when they heard the good news about Jesus Christ and responded to it. Through the proclamation of the message, the righteousness or impartiality of God and Christ were revealed, for the call or invitation to become God’s approved children and to share in the associated privileges and blessings came to be extended impartially to both Jews and non-Jews. Jesus Christ is the Saviour, for through him believers, without partiality being shown to anyone, are delivered from sin and the condemnation of death to which sin leads. (1:1)

“Favour” or unmerited kindness embraces all the aid and guidance that God and Christ provide to believers, and “peace” is the inner sense of calmness and well-being that comes from the personal awareness of their compassionate concern and love. The prayerful expression is that believers come to experience gracious favour and peace to a greater extent “in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.” To “know” God and the Lord Jesus Christ means to have an approved relationship with them. It also signifies adhering to God’s ways and the example and teaching of his Son. (Jeremiah 22:15, 16; Matthew 7:21-23; Luke 6:46; 1 John 2:3-6; 3:5, 6.) When believers grow in their relationship with God and Christ, coming to know them better, they, in fuller measure, experience their

gracious favour in the form of help and guidance and an inner calm and tranquillity. (1:2)

Verses 3-4. The spiritual endowment of believers

“His divine power” could either be that of Jesus our Lord (the closest antecedent) or that of his Father (if the antecedent is “God”). Both meanings can be found in translations that contain an explicit rendering. “God’s divine power has bestowed on us everything.” (REB) “It was all given to us by God’s own power.” (CEV) “Jesus has the power of God, by which he has given us everything.” (NCV) Believers came to experience the working of divine power “through the knowledge of him who called [them] by his own glory and virtue.” This divine power became operative in the lives of believers through God’s spirit, motivating them to think, speak, and act in a manner that is divinely approved. Accordingly, it is divine power that has generously imparted to believers everything they need for “life and godliness.” They are empowered to live life as God would want them to live and to manifest a godly or reverential spirit in everything they do. (1:3)

In verse 3, extant Greek manuscripts read either “his own glory and virtue” or “through glory and virtue.” The reference could be either to the Father or to his Son, and this is reflected in translations. “It was all given to us by God’s own power, when we learned that he had invited us to share in his wonderful goodness.” (CEV) “Jesus called us by his glory and goodness.” (NCV) “God, in his power, has given us everything that we need for a life in true piety. He has done this by letting us recognize Jesus Christ, him who has called us in his glory and strength.” (*Gott in seiner Macht hat uns alles geschenkt, was wir zu einem Leben in wahrer Frömmigkeit brauchen. Er hat es dadurch getan, dass er uns Jesus Christus erkennen ließ, ihn, der uns in seiner Herrlichkeit und Kraft berufen hat.* [German, *Gute Nachricht Bibel*])

When the Father is regarded as the one doing the calling, then the knowledge about him may be understood as having been revealed through the Son. The Father’s own glory and virtue could include his marvelous attributes of love, wisdom, compassion, and justice or impartiality. His virtue or moral excellence could be understood of his being the source of everything that is good because of his being holy or pure in the absolute sense. The manuscript reading “through glory and virtue” could signify that the knowledge of the Father was made known by the “glory and virtue” or moral excellence of the Son, for he flawlessly reflected the image of his Father. (1:3; John 1:14)

If, on the other hand, the focus is on Jesus Christ as the one doing the calling, inviting humans to become his disciples (Matthew 11:28, 29), his miraculous

works could be included in the manifestation of his “glory.” (John 2:11) Jesus Christ proved himself to be virtuous in every way. In his disposition, words, and deeds, he lived a life unspotted by sin, served others selflessly and, in expression of his love, surrendered his life for the human family. Those who gain knowledge of the Son of God, coming into a relationship with him as his disciples, have everything needed for the real life as devoted servants of his Father and for conducting themselves in a manner that is pleasing to him. The operation of divine power makes it possible for them to imitate Jesus Christ and thus prove themselves to be his Father’s obedient children. (1:3)

Through the “glory and virtue” of either the Father or the Son, humans have responded in faith. This has resulted in their coming into an approved relationship with the Son and, through him, with his Father. By reason of their response to the revealed “glory and virtue,” believers have been given “precious” and surpassingly “great promises.” These promises included coming to be united with Christ on his return as part of the sinless family of God’s children for all eternity. Being God’s children would mean sharing in all the associated privileges and blessings. No greater promises nor more valuable promises than these could be given to anyone. (1:4)

1:5-9. The way to Christian growth

Verses 5-7. Employment of one’s spiritual endowment.

With seeming reference to the promises, verse 4 continues, “through these” believers would become “sharers of divine nature.” This could mean that, on the basis of the promises, they had the assurance of coming to be of like nature as Christ since his resurrection and ascension to heaven. Upon coming to be like Christ in the glorified sinless state, they would be able to reflect the image of his Father flawlessly. Based on the sure hope that these promises provide, believers have “escaped the corruption in the world” that has its source “in desire,” selfish craving, or lust. Their hope motivated them to purify themselves from worldly corruption or defilement and to live in harmony with their having been cleansed from sin on the basis of Jesus’ precious sacrifice. (1:4, 9; 2 Corinthians 6:18; 7:1; 1 Peter 1:18, 19; 1 John 3:2, 3.)

In order to remain free from the world’s corruption, believers need to continue to yield to the leading of God’s spirit. This calls for diligent personal effort in, or active cooperation with, the work of God, which work is promoting the continued growth of believers as reflectors of his glory by their praiseworthy disposition, words, and deeds. The introductory *kaí autó touto dé* (literally, “also same this, however”) has been variously translated (“with this in view” [NJB], “for this very reason” [NAB, NIV, NRSV], “because you have these blessings”

[NCV]) and could relate to the promises believers have been given or to everything in which they have come to be and will be sharers, prompting them to be earnest about acting in harmony with the admonition that follows. (1:5)

On account of what they presently enjoy and have been promised, believers have good reason to exert themselves to conform ever more closely to the image of God. The thought of earnestness, diligence, or eagerness in this respect is expressed by the Greek term *spoudé*, which, in its basic sense, denotes “haste” or “speed.” Believers are to “apply all diligence” or to make every effort to add to their “faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge, and to knowledge self-control, and to self-control endurance, and to endurance godliness, and to godliness brotherly affection, and to brotherly affection love.” (1:5-7)

It is not enough for individuals merely to have faith or belief in God and Christ. Believers need to have an active faith that finds expression in the life they live. So, to their faith, they should add virtue or moral excellence, being diligent about striving to conform their lives in keeping with the teaching and example of the Lord Jesus Christ. For one to be identified as a virtuous person would require that one live up to the highest possible standard of uprightness and be responsive to the needs of others. The “knowledge” that needs to be added to virtue is the knowledge that relates to God and Christ. Growth in this knowledge is evident from a believer’s making progress in reflecting to a greater degree the image of God in attitude, word, and action. (1:5)

“Self-control” must be added to knowledge, for knowing what is pleasing to God and Christ must be accompanied by action that is consistent therewith. Therefore, the believer must be earnest about seeking to bridle his passions and desires, not yielding to sinful inclinations. Endurance is to be added to self-control. The distress, pressure, or hardship to which believers may be submitted can last for a considerable period, requiring that they resist the temptation to give up under the strain or to free themselves from the difficult circumstances by divinely disapproved means. So, to be able to continue to exercise self-control, believers need endurance. While enduring difficult circumstances, they need to maintain piety, godliness, or a reverential spirit, not allowing themselves to become irritated, weary, or downcast because of what may happen to them by divine permission. With godliness added to, or combined with, endurance, believers will not become angry at God and Christ but will be able to see how their suffering can result in lasting spiritual benefits. Godliness will also make it possible for believers to pray for those who persecute them, continuing to desire that their persecutors might repent and come to be devoted disciples of Jesus Christ. (1:6)

Although forgiven of their sins, believers are not sinless. Some in the community of believers may at times manifest an offensive disposition, speak in a hurtful manner, or act inconsiderately or improperly. By adding “brotherly affection” to endurance, believers will be able to avoid becoming irritated to the point where they begin to harbour ill will or deep resentment toward fellow believers. Finally, “love” must be added to “brotherly affection.” This love is a selfless concern for the welfare of others regardless of their moral standing. It reaches beyond the community of believers and includes even those who may be hostile toward disciples of God’s Son. (1:7)

Verses 8-9. The resultant manifestation of spiritual maturity

One’s adding virtue, knowledge, self-control, endurance, godliness, brotherly affection, and love to faith results in a life that honors Christ and his Father. “For when these things exist and abound in you, they will keep you from being idle or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (1:8)

The knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ would include recognizing his role as Saviour, the one through whom humans can be delivered from sin and the condemnation to which sin leads. To know him would also mean having a relationship with him because of putting faith in him and living in harmony with his example and teaching. A believer’s knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ should lead to advancement in living an upright life and in doing positive good for others. When the faith of believers is combined with virtue, knowledge, endurance, godliness, brotherly affection, and love, being in their possession in a superabundant way, they will not be “idle or unfruitful.” They will be active in doing good, manifesting compassionate concern for others. Their lives will be productive of praiseworthy conduct. The evidence of their knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ will be clearly evident from their disposition, words, and deeds. (1:8)

If, however, a professed believer’s life revealed an absence of virtue, knowledge, self-control, endurance, godliness, brotherly affection, and love, he would be “blind,” failing to recognize what it means to know Jesus Christ as his Lord whose example and teaching he is under obligation to follow. Choosing to be Christ’s disciple requires assuming the responsibilities associated with it. So one who fails to manifest the qualities that should distinguish believers would be closing his eyes (*myopázo*), which could signify a deliberate choice not to see what he should be doing. The Greek word *myopázo* has also been understood to mean to be “nearsighted,” the closing of the eyes being the action of nearsighted persons who squint in an effort to see something. Possibly “blindness” and “nearsightedness” function together to indicate that the individual is so nearsighted as to be blind. According to another meaning conveyed by an

interpretive rendering, the individual “is blind or, at least, very near-sighted.” (German, *Gute Nachricht Bibel*) The failure to grow as a believer reveals the individual’s “forgetfulness of the cleansing from sins of old.” (1:9)

Upon putting faith in Jesus Christ and the forgiveness his sacrificial death made possible, the believer came to be cleansed from “sins of old” or from all past sins. In harmony with that initial cleansing, the individual should have exerted himself in becoming more like the Lord Jesus Christ in every aspect of his life. When not doing so, the professed believer would be one who had forgotten or completely lost sight of his past cleansing and what this required of him to remain divinely approved. Such a person would be in grave spiritual danger, the danger of losing out on the privileges and blessings to be granted to Christ’s disciples. (1:9)

1:10-15. The consummation of Christian growth

Verse 10. Assuring our calling and election

Addressed as “brothers,” or members of the family of God’s children, believers are therefore urged to be diligent about making their “call and election firm” so as not to lose out. They were called or invited to be reconciled to God as persons forgiven of their sins on the basis of his Son’s sacrifice. Their election was the divine choosing of them to be God’s children. To maintain an approved standing in God’s family, believers need to be earnest in demonstrating themselves to be obedient, continuing to follow the leading of his spirit so as to be more like him and his Son. Accordingly, by acting in harmony with the admonition contained in 2 Peter (literally, “doing these [things]”), they would not be among those who “trip,” stumble, or fail. (1:10)

Verses 11-15. Entering the eternal kingdom

By making their “call and election firm,” believers are assured of being granted entry into the “eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” This ultimate entrance into the kingdom would mean coming to be part of the realm where Jesus Christ is recognized as king by his Father’s appointment and enjoying the status of sinless persons in this realm, a realm that is “eternal” or that will never pass away. (1:11)

For those who are found to be approved disciples, their entry into the kingdom would be “richly provided.” This could mean that theirs would be a glorious entry, being welcomed into the heavenly realm as persons acknowledged to have been exemplary devoted servants of God and Christ. It could also signify the high degree of blessedness they would come to enjoy for having exerted

themselves in advancing Christ's cause in attitude, word, and action. They would not be like believers whose works Christ's judgment would expose as having been worthless but who, because of having him as their foundation, would not lose out on life despite their failings. The deliverance of those whose works would not prove to be praiseworthy would be like that of persons who would lose everything in a fire but would themselves be snatched from the flames. Their entry into the kingdom would then not be "richly provided." (1:11; compare 1 Corinthians 3:15.)

Because of his concern that fellow believers would make their "call and election firm," Peter sought "always to remind" them "about these [things]." Previously he had stressed the importance of making advancement as believers, their adding virtue, knowledge, self-control, endurance, godliness, brotherly affection, and love to their faith, and then he emphasized the need for them to make their "call and election firm." Therefore, "these things" would seemingly be included as the object of Peter's reminders. Additionally, the reference may be to comments that follow — the surety of the prophetic word and the apostolic testimony that served as the foundation for faith in Christ and his return in glory. In fact, everything contained in 2 Peter could be regarded as serving to remind believers about what they already knew regarding their responsibilities as Christ's disciples and their hope. They were firmly grounded in the truth. This would be the "truth" relating to Christ and all that his Father accomplished through him. In the Greek text, the word for "truth" is preceded by a form of the term *páreimi*, meaning to "be present," and here appears to denote that the truth was in the possession of the believers who were being addressed. (1:12)

Although the things Peter called to the attention of believers were not new to them, he, as long as he was alive or in his "tent," his temporary abode, or his physical body, considered it right to stir them up with reminders. He did not want them to become neglectful regarding their responsibilities as Christ's disciples and then lose out on future blessings. (1:13)

According to John 21:18, 19, Jesus Christ revealed to Peter that he, after having grown old, would be taken where he did not wish, that is, to the place where he would be executed. For this reason, Peter could speak of knowing that he would soon be putting aside his "tent." Based on what the Lord Jesus Christ had told him, he knew that he would soon die a martyr's death. (1:14)

While he still had life, he would do his utmost to continue to provide reminders each time he had the opportunity to do so. Then, after his departure, the believers to whom he had given the reminders would be able to recall what he had said and make mention of the things he had drawn to their attention. (1:15)

1:16-21. Christian growth and biblical authority

Verses 16-18. The authority of apostolic testimony

What Peter had made known about the “power and [future] arrival [*parousía*] of the Lord Jesus Christ” did not follow some cleverly formulated “myth.” He, James, and John had personally become eyewitnesses of Jesus Christ’s magnificence. While at a location on a high mountain (likely Mount Hermon) and after waking up from sleep during the night, they saw the transfiguration of Jesus Christ. His face shown more brightly than the sun, and his garments appeared whiter than any laundryman could have made them. In the darkness, the brilliance of Jesus’ face and the dazzling whiteness of his garments must have been exceptionally impressive. Rightly, Peter could speak of having been an eyewitness of the majesty of the Lord Jesus Christ. (1:16; Matthew 17:1-3; Mark 9:2, 3; Luke 9:28, 29)

The magnificent appearance of the Lord Jesus Christ in the transfigured state revealed that his return would be with power, for the appearance was suggestive of surpassing splendour or royal dignity. The changed appearance revealed that, upon his return, he would be manifest in glory. Therefore, all that Peter conveyed about the “power” and future return of Jesus Christ had a solid basis, the basis being the transfiguration for which there were three eyewitnesses. (1:16)

On the occasion of the transfiguration, Jesus Christ received “honor and glory” from God the Father. From the “majestic glory,” Peter, James, and John heard the words, “This is my son, my beloved, with whom I am pleased.” The voice that conveyed these words to Jesus Christ came from a “bright cloud,” providing a basis for concluding that it is being referred to as the “majestic glory.” (Matthew 17:5; for another possible meaning, see the Notes section.) When acknowledging Jesus Christ as his beloved Son, the Father honored him, and the brilliant transformation he effected in his Son’s appearance constituted a bestowal of glory, splendour, or magnificence. (1:17)

As eyewitnesses, Peter, James, and John heard the words that were conveyed to Jesus from heaven while they “were with him on the holy mountain.” The voice came from the bright cloud that overshadowed Peter, James, and John. This appears to be the reason the voice is referred to as coming from heaven. As the site of the transfiguration and the Father’s acknowledgment of Jesus Christ as his beloved Son, the mountain is rightly called the “holy mountain.” (1:18)

Verses 19-21. The authority of the written word

If, in verse 19, there is a direct link to the transfiguration, this would mean that the transfiguration made the prophetic word relating to Jesus Christ more firm, serving to establish it as completely reliable. “All this confirms for us the message of the prophets.” (REB) “All of this makes us even more certain that what the prophets said is true.” (CEV) Another possibility is that the message of the prophets served to provide additional testimony on which believers can rely as a sure foundation for their faith and hope. “Moreover, we possess the prophetic message that is altogether reliable.” (NAB)

Believers do well to focus on the prophetic word “as to a lamp shining in a dark [*auchmerós*] place.” The Greek term *auchmerós* literally means “dry” or “parched.” In this context, however, it appears to describe a dreary, gloomy or dark place. In the dark, one needs a lamp or torch in order to avoid obstacles and possible injury. Like a lamp, the prophetic word provides essential enlightenment for believers to conduct themselves in a divinely approved manner. It keeps ever before them the certainty of Christ’s return, encouraging them to live in harmony with his example and teaching so as to be acknowledged by him as his disciples at the time of his arrival. (1:19)

Depending on the punctuation that is chosen, the concluding phrase “in your hearts” may convey two different meanings. If the comments relating to the “lamp” and the “morning star” (*phosphóros*) are parenthetical, the thought could be, “And we have the prophetic word [made] more firm, to which [word] you are doing well to have [your focus] in your hearts.” This would mean that in their “hearts” or inner selves believers should be letting the prophetic word serve as their guide. They should depend on the prophetic word for guidance just as they would rely on a lamp for illumination in a dark place, doing so until “day dawns and the morning star rises.” (1:19)

The other possible meaning is that the prophetic word should be providing illumination to believers as would a lamp until “day dawns and the morning star rises in [their] hearts.” The dawning of the day likely refers to the time when Jesus Christ returns in glory, at which time the walk of believers in the darkness or gloominess of the world would end. (1:19)

The Greek word *phosphóros* literally signifies “light bearer” and is the term ancient writers used to designate the planet Venus, the “morning star” that is visible in the eastern sky before or at sunrise. In conjunction with the dawning of day, the mention of the “morning star” may simply be part of the imagery to denote the new day that would dawn at Jesus Christ’s return. (1:19)

There is a possibility, however, that the term *phosphóros* designates Jesus Christ. According to Revelation 22:16, he referred to himself as the “bright morning star” (*astér ho lamprós ho proinós*). Although the Greek expression is different, this may provide a basis for considering *phosphóros* to apply to Jesus Christ. Without linking the phrase “in your hearts” to the rising of the “morning star,” this could mean that the Son of God would be revealed in all his glory or magnificence like the brightly shining morning star. If, on the other hand, the morning star is to be understood as rising in the hearts, this could signify that, upon seeing Jesus Christ as he really is in all his magnificence as the returned King of kings and Lord of lords, the hearts or inner selves of believers would be illuminated as if the morning star had risen within them. (1:19)

On account of the trustworthiness of the prophetic word, believers were in possession of a solid basis for looking forward to the certainty of Christ’s return. “First” of all, they should “know” or understand that “prophecy of scripture” does not have its source in private explanation or interpretation. The Hebrew prophets did not make predictions on the basis of their own evaluations of trends and developments in human affairs. (1:20)

At no time did the prophecies preserved in the holy writings come from the will or wish of any human. Prophecy proved to be divine revelation, for “men” (the prophets) were “borne” or moved by the “holy spirit” so as to speak “from God.” By means of his spirit, God conveyed his message to the prophets, and so they were the instruments through whom he made known both the sufferings his Son would experience and the glories that would then follow. (1:21)

Notes:

Jesus Christ gave the name “Peter,” meaning “rock,” to Simon. (John 1:42) Whenever Peter’s original name appears in the Scriptures, the most common spelling is “Simon.” Besides 2 Peter 1:1, the spelling “Symeon” is only found in Acts 15:14 in extant Greek manuscripts.

In verse 1, “Saviour” is in the genitive case but is not preceded by the definite article in the Greek text. For this reason, the concluding phrase could also be rendered, as do many translations, “the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ.” It appears that the preferable rendering would be to add the definite article before “Saviour,” which would harmonize with verse 2, where the reference is to the “knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.”

In verse 12, the reading of manuscripts varies (“I shall intend [*melléso*] always to remind you”; “I shall not neglect [*ouk ameléso*] always to remind you”).

The first person plural verb forms in verses 16 and 18 (“we did make known,” “having been,” and “we heard”) are probably an editorial plural but could also have been meant to include James and John.

Many understand the reference to the “Majestic Glory” in verse 17 to apply to the Father. A number of translations make this significance explicit. “God, our great and wonderful Father, truly honoured him by saying, ‘This is my own dear Son, and I am pleased with him.’” (CEV) “Jesus heard the voice of God, the Greatest Glory.” (NCV) In verse 17, another manuscript reading is, “This is my Son, the beloved.”

Instead of “from God men spoke [*elálesan apó theού ánthropoi*]” (in verse 21), other manuscripts read, “the holy men of God spoke [*elálesan hoi hágioi theού ánthropoi*].”



Tradition has it that Peter was buried in the area covered by St. Peter's in Vatican City, Rome

1 Peter and 2 Peter in contrast

| 1 Peter | 2 Peter |
|--|--|
| Emphasis on Suffering | False teaching and false teachers |
| Redemptive title - Christ | Title of Dominion-Lord |
| Consolation | Warning |
| Hope to face trial | Full knowledge to face error |
| Seven different words for “suffering” occur, and theme occurs over and over again. | The word ‘know’ and its cognates occur 13 times: 1:2,3,5,6,8,12,14,20, 2:9, 20, 21 (twice); 17, 18 |

2 Peter 2:1-22

2:1-3a. False teachers – their rise

Verse 1. Their activity

To remain divinely approved, disciples of God’s Son needed to be on guard against corrupt influences that would come to exist within the community of believers. “Among the people,” that is, among God’s people Israel, false prophets arose. These lying prophets lulled the Israelites into a false sense of security and contributed measurably to their waywardness. Just as the Israelites came to have false prophets in their midst, believers would come to have teachers of error. The corrupt teachers would become responsible for introducing “destructive sects,” causing division by advancing views that were contrary to the truth that Jesus Christ had revealed by his example and teaching. Those who adopted their erroneous opinions would thus come to form factions that aligned themselves with the false teachers and against believers who rejected their false doctrines. Such factions or sects are “destructive,” for they disrupt the peace existing in the community of believers and are ruinous to the faith that has Christ as its foundation. (2:1)

Verses 2-3. Their influence

By failing to adhere to Christ and his teaching, the proponents of error deny him as the “Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction on themselves.” Their failure to submit to Christ as the head of the community of believers by advancing their own views leads them into a spiritually and morally corrupt way. Their deliberate course of disloyalty to Christ, denying him as the rightful Lord whose direction they should be following because he bought them with his

precious blood, inescapably leads to their destruction. When Jesus Christ renders his judgment against them, their ruin will swiftly follow. (2:1)

Just as the false prophets deceived many among the Israelites, so the false teachers would gain many adherents who would follow them in their “licentious ways” (a plural form of *asélgeia*). The shockingly corrupt conduct of professed believers, particularly that of the false teachers, would not escape the attention of unbelievers. Because the corrupt individuals would claim to be Christ’s disciples, the “way of the truth” would be “blasphemed.” Unbelievers would begin to blaspheme, revile, malign, or speak abusively of the way of life that centered in the truth that Jesus Christ revealed in his person and teaching. They would point to the debased conduct of the corrupt teachers and their followers as confirming that belief in Jesus Christ was destructive to the existing social order. (2:2)

2:3b-9. False teachers – their doom

Verse 3b. Their certain judgment declared

Teachers of error are motivated by “covetousness” or “greed.” “And in [their] greed,” they resort to using “fabricated words” in an effort to “exploit” (*emporeúomai*) believers. These false teachers would have an inordinate desire for power over others and the material profit and recognition they would receive from their followers. Their words would be mere fabrications, having no basis in truth, but would sound plausible to those who would be deceived. The Greek term *emporeúomai* relates to carrying on business transactions or trade. In this context, the thought would be conducting business in a dishonest manner and, therefore, engaging in exploitation. With lies, the teachers of falsehood would take advantage of others, making them their victims and persons from whom they could derive personal profit. (2:3)

In the case of the proponents of ruinous error, their “judgment” or condemnation that has been divinely determined upon “from of old is not idle, and their destruction is not dozing.” Adverse divine judgment is certain. “From of old,” God decreed that those who prove to be the devil’s “seed” or offspring would be condemned. (Compare Genesis 3:15; John 8:44; 1 John 3:7, 8; Jude 14, 15.) This judgment is no idle or empty threat that will never be carried out. It is not asleep or dormant, without any assurance that it will ever be executed. (2:3)

Verses 4-8; Their certain ruin illustrated

Past events provide unmistakable proof that the condemnatory judgment will be carried out without fail. “God did not spare the angels who sinned.” Although

they had been in his very presence and once enjoyed the status of his approved sons, they lost their place in his family when they gave up their heavenly estate. According to Genesis 6:1-4, these “sons of God” took “daughters of men” as their wives and had offspring by them. While the Genesis account does not mention the action that God took against these angels who sinned, Jews in the first century appear to have been familiar with accounts that did provide details. (2:4)

God handed the disobedient angels over to “chains [*seiraís*] of darkness” or, according to another manuscript reading, “pits [*siroís*] of darkness.” The “chains of darkness” could designate confining restrictions that placed the disobedient angels in a state of darkness, cut off completely from the “light,” or the life and associated blessings enjoyed by those who are part of the family of God’s children. Similarly, “pits of darkness” could denote a condition of confinement, with nothing to brighten the gloom resulting from the permanent end of all fellowship with God. (2:4)

The debasement of the disobedient angels is seemingly expressed by a form of the Greek verb *tartaróo*, meaning to “cast into Tartarus.” In their debased and gloomy condition of confinement, the angels who sinned are kept for their final judgment. So, although the ultimate punishment was not inflicted on the disobedient angels, they would not escape the future condemnation. This confirmed that teachers of pernicious error would likewise have no hope of being delivered from the judgment that would be expressed against them. Their future ruin was certain.

God did not spare the “ancient world,” but he preserved Noah, “the eighth one,” a “proclaimer of righteousness,” when he “brought a flood on the world of the impious.” In being designated as the “eighth,” Noah is identified as the one who survived the deluge along with seven others (his wife, their three sons Ham, Shem, and Japheth, and their wives). As a “proclaimer of righteousness,” Noah made known the just judgment to be executed upon the godless world and, by constructing the ark, indicated that only by acting in harmony with God’s commands would individuals survive the coming deluge. The fact that God decreed a means for survival also revealed his righteousness or justice, for those who wanted to do what is right would have the opportunity to be saved from the judgment that would be expressed against the godless ones. In a sense, the building of the ark constituted Noah’s tangible proclamation of divine justice. (2:5)

The fiery destruction of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah reduced them to ashes. By thus condemning these cities or, according to another manuscript

reading, condemning them “to destruction,” God set them as a warning “example” of what would befall the impious. (2:6; see the Notes section.)

Lot and two daughters did not perish with the ungodly inhabitants of Sodom. God rescued him, sending two angels to the city to instruct him and his family to flee out of the area destined for destruction. Lot is called a “righteous man,” for he did not live like the morally corrupt inhabitants of Sodom. The debased conduct of the city’s inhabitants was not limited to sexual depravity. According to Ezekiel 16:49, they were an arrogant people who had no regard for the poor and the needy. Lot was greatly distressed when he witnessed the licentious conduct of the lawless inhabitants of Sodom. They were “lawless,” for they acted contrary to the inner sense of human decency and propriety. (2:7)

As a “righteous man,” one who tried to live uprightly, Lot tormented his “righteous soul,” that is, himself. This was because “from day to day,” while residing among them, he saw and heard their “lawless works.” He did not escape being a witness to their God-dishonouring conduct. (2:8)

Verse 9. The divine principle enunciated

The fact that Noah and his family survived the deluge and that Lot did not perish with the inhabitants of Sodom reveals that the “Lord knows [how] to rescue godly ones from trial,” distress, trouble, or calamity. At the same time, destruction did befall the ungodly, demonstrating that God can “keep the unrighteous for the day of judgment.” (2:9)

In the Greek text, a participial form of the verb *kolázo*, defined as meaning “punish,” follows the words about judgment day. This could signify that punishment awaits the ungodly at the time they will then be called to account. A number of translations convey this meaning. “The Lord knows how ... to reserve his punishment for the wicked until his day comes.” (J. B. Phillips) “The Lord is well able to ... hold the wicked for their punishment until the Day of Judgement.” (NJB) “The Lord knows how ... to be reserving the unrighteous for the day of judgment to be punished.” (K. S. Wuest) Others have translated the verse to mean that divine punishment precedes the day of judgment, with the final accounting coming on that day. This, however, does not seem likely, as it does not fit the fact that, in the case of the deluge and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, the preservation of the upright and the ruin of the wicked occurred at the same time. (2:9)

2:10-16. False teachers – their presumption and greed

Verses 10-12. Their sin of presumption specified

Especially is it certain that condemnation will be expressed against persons who indulge their base fleshly desires (literally, “going after flesh in [the] passion of defilement”) and show contempt for “lordship.” These would be persons who are totally given to a degraded way of life and who have no respect for any kind of authority, doing whatever they please without regard for anyone else. As individuals, they are “bold,” brazen, or audacious, and “self-willed” or stubborn, resisting anyone who might stand in the way of their dishonourable objectives. The reference to their not “trembling” at “glories” may mean that they have no fear or respect for anyone who occupies a position of glory or dignity. Nothing appears to restrain them from pursuing their corrupt way of life. They blaspheme or speak abusively of all, refusing to grant anyone, not even God, the honour they deserve. (2:10)

The course of these corrupt individuals contrasts sharply with that of angels who are superior in “strength and power.” These angels do not abuse their greater strength and power, never acting in a high-handed manner or resorting to insults. They “do not bring blasphemous judgment against them before the Lord.” Possibly the “them” against whom angels do not express judgment in abusive words are the teachers of error, as they have been the main focus of the warning admonition. “But even the angels, who are much stronger and more powerful than false teachers, do not accuse them with insults before the Lord.” (NCV) Although the angels would have reason to denounce them, they do not employ blasphemous or abusive speech, manifesting the highest regard for God as the holy one who disapproves all reviling. (2:11)

12b-13a. The punishment of their sin

13b-14. Their moral obliquity

The corrupt proponents of error are like irrational animals that have come into existence to be captured and destroyed or killed. These brute beasts to whom teachers of falsehood are likened are also described as *physikós*, meaning “physical” or “natural,” and could signify that they are mere beasts governed by instinct. It would appear that the reference to coming into existence to be “captured and destroyed” could relate to the fact that the roles of predator and prey are part of the existing cycle in the wild and also that these animals served as a food source for humans. As creatures hunted or raised for food, the ultimate end of their existence proved to be capture and slaughter. Teachers of pernicious error are described as “blaspheming,” or speaking abusively or insultingly of

things they do not “know” or understand. Without any appreciation for God’s upright ways, they ridicule or insult whom or what they should regard with due respect. “In their corruption,” or in their pursuit of a debased way of life, “they also will be corrupted” or destroyed like the brute beasts. (2:12)

These individuals wrong themselves by their wrongdoing. The “wage,” or repayment for the injury they cause, is the ruin that results to them and which they have brought upon themselves by their God-dishonouring ways. (2:13)

The corrupt teachers regarded “luxury” or self-indulgence in the “day,” a time when they should have been engaged in productive work, as a pleasure to be enjoyed. Their objective was to satisfy their debased cravings. Because of their corrupt conduct, they proved to be “stains and blemishes,” ruinous to the reputation of believers. While they feasted with believers, they revelled in “their deceptions.” This could mean that they used the social interaction at meals to advance their corrupt teaching and to exploit others for their vile objectives. (2:13)

They transformed occasions that should have been times for expressing genuine love into opportunities for indulging their passions. Their eyes were “full of adultery [literally, ‘full of an adulteress,’ according to P72, Codex Vaticanus, and numerous other manuscripts] and ceaseless of sin.” They passionately looked for women with whom they could commit adultery and, without letup, they indulged their lusts. Having a “heart trained in covetousness” or greed, they would entice “unstable souls.” These individuals were “accursed children,” for God’s curse rested on them because of their degraded conduct. The “unstable souls” they tried to seduce would have been persons who had not as yet become firmly grounded in the truth about Jesus Christ and what living in harmony with his example and teaching required. In their “heart” or their inner self, the teachers of falsehood had become accustomed to being impelled to desire that to which they had no right, and this motivated them to ensnare others into engaging in immorality. Sin had become their way of life, and they never desisted from striving to satisfy their base desires. (2:14)

Verses 15-16. Their mercenary character illustrated

The proponents of falsehood had forsaken the “straight way,” turning aside from the course that honoured God and Christ. As victims of their self-deception, they were misled, drawn into a debased way of life. “They followed the way of Balaam of Bosor [Beor or Beorsor, according to other manuscripts], who loved the wage of unrighteousness.” (2:15)

According to the Septuagint reading of Numbers 22:5, the diviner Balaam was the “son of Beor.” YHWH God revealed to him that he should not curse the Israelites, but he very much desired the reward that Balak, the Moabite king, offered him for doing so. Although YHWH permitted him to accompany the second delegation Balak had sent, provided that he would only speak what would be revealed to him, Balaam appears to have set out on the way to meet Balak with the intent of obtaining the “wage of unrighteousness.” He, in defiance of God’s will, wanted the reward for the unrighteous or unjust act of cursing the Israelites. That this was his ultimate objective, though not expressly stated in the account in the book of Numbers, is evident from the fact that, when he could not curse the Israelites, he instructed Balak how he could use Moabite and Midianite women to seduce Israelite males to share in idolatry and sexual immorality, thereby having them bring God’s curse upon themselves. (2:15; Numbers 22:7-21; 25:1-3, 17, 18; 31:16; Revelation 2:14)

On the way with the second delegation Balak had sent, Balaam received a reproof for his “own lawlessness,” or for his intent to transgress the divine command that he not curse the Israelites. A “speechless” pack animal, his own female donkey that had no inherent ability to speak, uttered words with the “voice of a man,” which, at the time, “restrained the madness of the prophet.” As a diviner, one who made predictions, Balaam was a prophet. His madness involved his foolhardy defiance of God’s directive to him. For a time, the words of his female donkey brought him to his senses. Based on the account in Numbers 22:22-35, the “angel of YHWH” appears to have made it possible for Balaam to have perceived the words being spoken as coming from the mouth of his donkey. The example of Balaam may serve to show that not even a miracle would cause the false teachers to amend their ways. Possibly there is also an implication that believers whom the false teachers looked down upon as if they were inferiors would be able to resist them, just as the donkey restrained Balaam. (2:16)

2:17-18. False teachers – their empty intellectualism

Verse 17. They are devoid of God’s Spirit

Proponents of error are never the source of anything that proves to be beneficial. They may give the appearance of being like springs or wells from which a thirsty person might obtain refreshing water, but they are waterless, devoid of anything that would contribute to a person’s well-being. Teachers of pernicious error are likened to “mists” or, according to the reading of other manuscripts, “clouds” that a strong wind blows away. The formation of mists or clouds may give promise of much-needed rain, but those who look for rain are disappointed when they see mists or clouds quickly disappear because of being driven by

fierce gusts of wind. No light or enlightenment can come from false teachers. “For them the gloom of darkness has been kept.” They are destined for the darkness of the condemnatory judgment that has been reserved for them, forever cut off from the possibility of any relationship with God and the blessings to be enjoyed by his family of devoted children. (2:17)

Verse 18. They are snared by empty intellectualism

Proponents of falsehood utter “pompous” (*hypéronkos*) expressions, but their utterances are “emptiness” (*mataiôtes*). What they say may sound impressive and be spoken with forceful confidence. The Greek word *hypéronkos* is descriptive of something that is “puffed up” or “swollen” and, therefore, can signify “haughty,” “bombastic,” “pompous,” or “high-sounding.” What is uttered is designated as being *mataiôtes*, “emptiness,” “nothingness,” “nonsense,” something that is of no use or value. The utterances are just empty words. (2:18)

In their bearing and manner of speaking, false teachers can be very persuasive. By appealing to “the desires of the flesh,” they endeavor to entice believers who have “just” (*oligos*) or “really” (*ontos*, according to other manuscripts) escaped from those who conduct themselves “in error.” The Greek term *oligos*, basically means “little,” “small,” or “short.” In this case, the word denotes a “short time ago” or recently. The false teachers focus on persons who just recently had separated themselves from living as did those who conducted themselves in “error” or engaged in sinful practices. Especially for new believers, the pull from wrong desires can be very strong, making them more vulnerable to falling prey to corrupt teachers. (2:18)

In the Greek text, the expression “desires of the flesh” is followed by the plural form of *aselgeia*, which term would describe all manner of licentiousness or shockingly unbridled or indecent conduct. This could mean that, besides appealing to the desires of sinful human nature, the false teachers made licentiousness appear as acceptable, harmless, or desirable. (2:18) Translators have variously rendered the thought. “With their high-sounding but empty talk they tempt back people who have scarcely escaped from those who live in error, by playing on the disordered desires of their human nature and by debaucheries.” (NJB) “Talking empty bombast, they seduce with licentious desires of the flesh those who have barely escaped from people who live in error.” (NAB) “They use sensual lusts and debauchery as a bait to catch people who have only just begun to escape from their pagan associates.” (REB)

2:19-22. False teachers – their bondage to sin

Verse 19-20a. Their empty promise of liberty

To those who are the objects of their deceptive words, false teachers “promise freedom,” making it appear that believers are under no restraints in pursuing whatever they might desire. They do not and cannot offer anyone true freedom, which exists among those who live in harmony with a good conscience and have the highest regard for moral law. The proponents of pernicious error are themselves not free, for they are “slaves of corruption.” Depravity has gained the mastery over them. So, as slaves, all they can offer to others is a slave status, because whatever comes to control one’s life enslaves. (2:19)

Verses 20b-22. The plight of their victims

“Knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” involves a person’s coming into an approved relationship with him as his disciple, as a believer who recognizes Jesus Christ as his Lord whose example and teaching he is under obligation to follow and who, as his Saviour, delivered him from the condemnation to which sin leads. “If, after having escaped the defilements of the world” upon having come to know Jesus Christ, individuals again become entangled in the kind of unclean or degrading practices common in the world of mankind alienated from God and Christ, their last state would become worse than their first. Their condition would then be worse than the one in which they found themselves prior to their becoming believers. As unbelievers, they acted in ignorance. After coming to know what is right as clearly revealed in Jesus’ life, activity, and teaching, those who return to a corrupt way of life have no excuse. They cannot claim ignorance, making their sin much more serious. (2:20)

It would have been better for them not to have known the “way of righteousness than, after knowing it, to turn back from the holy commandment that had been given to them.” For those who do not yet know the “way of righteousness,” the hope exists that they may respond to the message about Christ and begin living an upright life. Their God-dishonouring course is not as serious. It does not bring the kind of direct reproach on God and Christ as does the waywardness of professing believers who received the “holy commandment” or the pure teaching of the Son of God that should have served as a law to them. The injurious effect on the conscience is not as great in the case of unbelievers, for wrongdoing did not require a revolt against the restraint of a conscience that had been enlightened by knowledge of God and Christ and the obligations this knowledge imposed. (2:21)

In the case of those who return to a debauched way of life, the “true proverb,” the saying that expresses an undeniable truth, applies, “The dog has returned to its own vomit, and the bathed sow to wallowing in mud.” Professed believers had left defiling conduct behind (comparable to the dog’s vomit and the mud that had been washed away from the sow) and had been cleansed from their sins but then, instead of continuing to make progress in upright living, returned to their former degraded state like unclean animals. (2:22; compare Proverbs 26:11.)

Notes:

In verse 2, not all manuscripts contain the expression “way of the truth.” Fifth-century Codex Alexandrinus, a correction in fourth-century Codex Sinaiticus, and a number of other manuscripts say “glory of the truth.”

Comments about Tartarus and the punishment of the disobedient angels are found in 1 Enoch, a book that appears to have been regarded as authoritative in the first century CE and earlier, as well as in later times. Presently, only the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and the Ethiopian Jews (Beta Israel) accept 1 Enoch as part of the Scriptures. According to the book of Enoch (X, 11), God instructed the angel Michael to “bind Semjâzâ and his associates who have united themselves with women so as to have defiled themselves with them in all their uncleanness.” This binding, however, is not represented as their final punishment, but they are said to remain in their bound state until “the day of their judgment and of their consummation.” (X, 12) “In those days they shall be led off to the abyss of fire.” (X, 13) Another passage (XX, 2) indicates that the angel Uriel is over Tartarus.

In the Septuagint, there are three occurrences of the expression “Tartarus.” Proverbs 30:16 includes Tartarus among the things that never say, “Enough.” Job 40:20 indicates that, when the wild beast (“behemoth,” according to the Hebrew text) ascended the “steep mountain, it made the quadrupeds in Tartarus rejoice.” In Job 41:24, the “dragon” (“leviathan,” according to the Hebrew text) is represented as accounting “Tartarus of the abyss as a captive.” These references to “Tartarus” could be understood as applying to the netherworld, but nothing specific about how the term was understood among the Jews can be established from the context.

In Greek mythology, Tartarus was the place of confinement for the Titans after the Olympian gods defeated them. In his *Against Apion* (II, 34, 35), Josephus commented on the compositions of the Greek poets about gods and goddesses, referring to the Titans as the “oldest” of all the gods and as having been bound “in Tartarus.” He, however, did not endorse the Greek myth about Tartarus, but

included it among tales regarding deities that Greek intellectuals had rightly censured.

It would appear that caution needs to be exercised about any definitive conclusions regarding how first-century believers may have understood comments about the binding of the angels who sinned and their being “cast into Tartarus.” Moreover, spirit persons are not subject to the same kind of restraints as are humans, and the visual imagery that appears in the Scriptures must of necessity be expressed in human terms.

Another manuscript reading of verse 6 represents what happened to Sodom and Gomorrah as an example to those who were about to act in a godless manner.

In verse 10, some interpret the “glories” to mean the superterrestrial powers of darkness or the fallen angels, maintaining that they still have a measure of “glory” or splendour by reason of their existence as mighty spirits. The faithful angels, though, by reason of having the backing of the Almighty God, are in possession of greater “strength and power” than these “glories.” (Verse 11) According to this interpretation, the faithful angels do not express an insulting judgment against the fallen angels before God. Support for this view is drawn from verse 9 of Jude, where the reference is to the archangel Michael who, when disputing with the devil about Moses’ body, did not dare to express judgment against him in blasphemous or abusive words. It does seem highly unusual, however, that persons who defied God and his guidance would be specifically censured for speaking abusively of fallen angels.

Instead of “wronging themselves” followed by the word “wage” (in verse 13), other manuscripts say “receiving a wage.” Numerous manuscripts, including P72 (of the late third or early fourth century CE), contain the word *apátails* (“deceptions”), whereas many other manuscripts read *agápais* (“love feasts”).



Peter refers to his presence at the Transfiguration, which probably took place on Mount Hermon

2 Peter 3:1-18

3:1-7. Last-day scoffers and the Second Advent

Verses 1-3. The warning concerning scoffers

Peter addressed fellow believers as “beloved ones,” mentioning that this was the second letter he had written to them. Like the first letter, this one also served as a reminder of things they knew. He wanted to arouse the “sincere thought” (*eilikriné diánoian*) of fellow believers. The Greek expression for “sincere thought” has been variously rendered “sincere intention” (NRSV), “honest minds” (NCV), “honest thought” (REB), and “unclouded understanding.” (NJB) The basic sense appears to be that Peter wanted his letters to stimulate the recipients to give sincere consideration to matters he brought to their attention. (3:1)

He wanted them to recall the words the “holy prophets” had spoken in the past and the “commandment of the Lord and Saviour.” The words “of your apostles” are linked to this commandment, indicating that the “commandment” was

originally made known through the apostles who had heard it from the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the Saviour, for it is through him that individuals are forgiven of their sins and delivered from the condemnation to which sin leads. (3:2)

In the context of this letter, the words the “holy prophets” spoke appear to relate specifically to the coming judgment upon the ungodly. As servants of God who faithfully proclaimed his message, they were “holy” or undefiled. They were not like the false prophets who uttered lies and so were unclean in God’s sight. According to verses 14 and 15 of the letter of Jude, Enoch was the first one of the prophets to speak of a day of judgment. Among the Hebrew prophets who warned of a judgment to come were Isaiah (66:15, 16), Jeremiah (25:31-33), Ezekiel (38:2-39:6), Daniel (7:9-22), Joel (3:11-15 [4:11-15]), Amos (9:1-4), Habakkuk (3:16-18), Zephaniah (1:14-18), Haggai (2:21, 22), Zechariah (14:1-16), and Malachi (4:1 [3:19]). In relation to the future judgment that would occur at the time of his return in glory, Jesus Christ gave the commandment for his disciples to remain awake or alert and to be prepared to welcome him, proving themselves to be loyal to him and actively advancing his interests. (Matthew 24:36-44; Mark 13:32-37; Luke 12:35-40; 21:34-36) The apostles, including Paul the apostle to the nations, did not neglect to convey the commandment to be prepared for the return of the Lord Jesus Christ and the judgment to come. (3:2; Acts 3:19-21; 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11)

The reference to “your apostles” need not be understood to mean that the writer excluded himself as an apostle and that, as some have concluded, he was no part of the generation which directly heard the teaching of the apostles. Joshua, for example, when addressing warriors from the tribes of Reuben and Gad and the half tribe of Manasseh, commended them, saying, “You have not forsaken your brothers,” that is, your fellow Israelites. (Joshua 22:1-3) The use of the second person plural “your brothers” did not mean that Joshua did not consider himself to be a “brother” or fellow Israelite. (3:2; Joshua 22:1-3)

“First,” or first of all, believers needed to know or understand that, in the “last days,” scoffers would come on the scene to scoff or ridicule, indulging their “own desires” or lusts. Some have taken these words to point to a late composition for 2 Peter, but these words do not point to knowledge of a development that was foreign to early believers. The apostle Paul warned the elders from the congregation in Ephesus that, after he would be gone, men from their midst would mistreat fellow believers, corrupt the truth, and get others to follow them as their disciples. (Acts 20:29, 30) Jesus Christ had indicated that, when seeing that his return appeared to be a long time away, certain ones in the community of believers would become abusive toward fellow believers and in other respects conduct themselves in a reprehensible manner. They would

express themselves like a slave whose master had departed, saying regarding his return, “My master delays in coming.” (Matthew 24:48-50; Luke 12:45-48) Failing to recognize that Jesus Christ could return at any time, the scoffers would ridicule the thought about any imminent return and would speak of it as if it would never take place. Acting without any sense of accountability to the Lord Jesus Christ who would indeed return to render judgment, they would act according to their own debased cravings. (3:3)

Verses 4-7. The nature of their scoffing

Having lost faith in Jesus’ promise that he would return, the scoffers in the “last days” or later times would say, “Where is the promise of his arrival [*parousía*]?” In their view, no evidence existed that the promised return and time of judgment would take place. Nothing had changed since their “fathers” or ancestors “fell asleep” or had died. Everything in the human realm, with people marrying, having children, and growing old and dying, had remained the same “from the beginning of creation.” (3:4)

Contrary to the thinking of the ridiculers, everything had not continued to be the same since the beginning. Although aware of the account that is preserved in the book of Genesis, the scoffers, “according to their wish” or their deliberate choice, would ignore what they knew about developments in the days of Noah. “Heavens” existed “of old,” and “by the word of God, earth out of water and through water came together [*synístemi*].” The Greek word *synístemi* basically means to “stand together” and can signify to “combine,” “prepare,” “establish,” or “hold together.” Based on the Genesis account, the formation of the land areas came about by their rising “out of the water.” “Through the water” perhaps means through the collecting of the water into seas that surrounded land and through the suspension of water above the land and the seas, which water became part of an apparent celestial dome. (3:5; Genesis 1:6-10)

The introductory “through which [plural in many manuscripts but singular in a few others]” could, as a plural, refer to the water on the earth and the water above the earth. This would mean that the land was flooded by means of water from the sky in the form of rain, combined with the water already on the earth, destroying the then-existing “world.” Another possibility is that the introductory words “through which” (plural) could indicate that the destruction of the world came about through God’s word, or by his express will, and the water. The singular “which,” found in a few manuscripts, could apply to either the word of God or to the water as causing the world to perish. The world that was destroyed included everything in the human realm outside the ark. (3:6)

The now-existing “heavens and earth,” however, are stored up by the “same word for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of impious men.” It was God’s word, or his declared purpose, that brought into existence the former “heavens and earth” and the factors that made a flood possible. The same “word” (God’s decreed purpose) that has reserved the present “heavens and earth for fire” will not fail to be fulfilled. (3:7)

Many have reasoned that, because literal water flooded the land, the divinely determined future destruction would be by literal fire, resulting in the conflagration of the whole material universe. This, however, is not necessarily the case and does not appear to be indicated in the Scriptures as a whole. In his letter to the Romans, the apostle Paul spoke of the whole creation as longing for the revelation of the “sons of God,” that is, of humans who have become part of his beloved family. At the time of this revelation of God’s children in the glory or splendour of the sinless state, the whole creation would be freed from the bondage in which it shared on account of the divine condemnation of human sinfulness. The creation would then no longer undergo senseless devastation and ruin. If the entire universe were to be utterly destroyed by fire, the creation would cease to exist and would not be liberated from the baneful effects that human sinfulness has had on the whole environment. A fiery end of the entire creation would not be its long-awaited liberation, or the means for obtaining the “freedom of the glory of the children of God.” (3:7; Romans 8:19-21)

In verse 13 of the third chapter of 2 Peter, God’s promise of “new heavens and a new earth” is mentioned. This promise is found in the book of Isaiah, and so it reasonably follows that the reference to the destruction by fire should be viewed in the light of the words of the prophet. Regarding the judgment to befall Edom, for example, Isaiah 34:9-11 (NAB) reads, “Edom’s streams shall be changed into pitch and her earth into sulphur, and her land shall become burning pitch; night and day it shall not be quenched, its smoke shall rise forever. From generation to generation she shall lie waste, never again shall anyone pass through her. But the desert owl and hoot owl shall possess her, the screech owl and raven shall dwell in her.” Edomites no longer exist as a people. So the land they once inhabited has ceased to be their possession, just as if it had been completely consumed by unquenchable fire. Although the portrayal of the utter desolation is represented as being by fire that continues to burn, the land is not depicted as destroyed but as becoming the habitat of birds and other creatures. (Isaiah 34:11-17) Similarly, in 2 Peter 3:7, the “heavens and earth” are stored up for fire, but it is not a “day of judgment” for the material universe but a time of judgment for humans who defiantly pursue a God-dishonouring way of life. The destruction to come is specifically identified as affecting the impious or godless

ones. This also fits the parallel with the flood in the time of Noah. The world of ungodly humans ended, but the universe remained, as did the earth itself. (3:7)

The expression “heavens and earth” is best understood in the light of the prophetic scriptures. Often “heaven” or “heavens” applies to the celestial dome, and so the expression “heavens and earth” is simply a way of identifying the sphere in which humans live. This sphere is an area of land and water that lies below what appears to be a vault or dome, where the sun may be seen during the day and the moon and the stars at night. In the prophetic writings, the destruction of nations is portrayed as the end of the sphere in which they lived. When these nations are no more, the sphere in which they lived (their land and its apparent celestial dome) no longer exists as far as they are concerned. According to Isaiah 34, YHWH’s anger would be directed against the nations and he would hand them over for slaughter. In connection with this judgment, the “heavens” would be “rolled up like a scroll.” Thus the sky or the celestial vault is portrayed as a scroll that touches the land and, when separated from the horizon, is rolled up. (Isaiah 34:2-4) Accordingly, also in 2 Peter 3, the fire for which the “heavens and earth” are reserved is indicative of the future thorough destruction of everything associated with the sphere of impious humans. (3:7)

3:8-10. God’s patience and the Day of the Lord

Verses 8-9. God’s time schedule

God’s time for the execution of judgment is not to be gauged by the way in which humans reckon time. What to humans may appear to be a long time is but a short time in the sight of the eternal God. On the other hand, God can effect in a brief period things that would take many years for humans to accomplish. Peter wanted his “beloved ones” or fellow believers to be aware of this fact, “One day [is] with the Lord like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day.” Recognizing that a “thousand years” are but as a day to God helps one to realize that the passage of many years does not mean that his word will not be fulfilled. Nevertheless, one should not postpone the reality of the coming time of judgment, reasoning that a very long time needs to pass for all aspects of the prophetic word to be carried out. What to humans might seem to require a thousand years, God can do in but one day. (3:8)

He is not slow about fulfilling his promise, as some might consider him to be because things do not happen as quickly as they imagine they should. The reality that Jesus Christ has not as yet returned in glory and that believers are still experiencing distress and have not been united with him as his Father’s sinless children does not mean that God is slow. Explaining the reason for what some might consider a long delay, Peter continued, “But he is patient with you [‘us,’

according to another manuscript reading] not wishing anyone to be destroyed but [desiring] all to have opportunity for repentance.” Divine patience has provided humans in the generations that have passed with the opportunity to hear the good news about Jesus Christ and to respond in faith and be found approved at the time of his return. As a loving Father, God wants as many as possible to become reconciled to him as his beloved children. (3:9)

Verse 10. The certainty of the Day of the Lord

The “day of the Lord” is certain to come. Jesus Christ will return in glory as the exalted King of kings and Lord of lords, with blessings to his approved disciples and severe judgment directed against those who have persisted in defying him and his Father. That day will arrive “like a thief” (“like a thief in the night,” according to other manuscripts), unexpectedly as would a thief to steal under the cover of darkness. All but Jesus Christ’s devoted disciples will then be found in an unprepared state. Nothing of the ungodly world will remain. “The heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and the elements will be destroyed by burning, and the earth and the works in it will be found [*eurísko*].” The sphere in which the ungodly functioned will come to a complete end. As with the loud crackling of materials that an intense fire consumes, the celestial dome of the ungodly will vanish. All the “elements” or parts of that godless world will be obliterated as by fire. The “earth” or the land that the ungodly regarded as their possession and all the works of human manufacture would be “found” or “discovered.” This could mean that the destructive element would not spare anything associated with the godless society. As the ungodly would lose everything, their whole world of “heavens and earth” would be utterly consumed. (3:10)

3:11-13. Present conduct and the eternal state

Verses 11-12a. The impetus to holy living

The entire world of godless human society (the present “heavens and earth” that constitute the sphere in which this society operates) is destined to end (literally, to be “loosed” as when something is broken up or dissolved). Not a trace of this world will remain. Its destruction will be as complete as that caused by an intense fire. Therefore, believers needed to consider carefully how they were living their lives, making sure that their conduct remained untainted by the corruption of the world. This aspect is presented in the form of a question, “What kind of [persons] should you be in holy conduct and godliness, awaiting and hastening [*speúdo*] the arrival [*parousía*] of the day of God [‘Lord,’ according to a few other manuscripts] by which the heavens being set on fire will be destroyed and the elements melted by burning?” (3:11, 12)

The realization that everything of the godless world will come to an end should motivate believers to avoid being contaminated by it and to conduct themselves in a “holy” or pure way and to manifest a godly or reverential spirit in everything they do and say. Godliness would also be evident in their having an active concern for the welfare of others, being willing and eager to respond compassionately to their needs. (3:11)

12b-13. The glorious expectation

The “day of God” is the time when he will judge the world by means of his Son Jesus Christ. This day will arrive at the time Jesus returns in glory as the exalted King of kings and Lord of lords. Believers demonstrate that they are awaiting the day by maintaining upright conduct and being diligent about advancing Christ’s interests. In this manner, they continue to be in a state of readiness for the arrival of the “day of God,” looking forward to the blessings that will then be bestowed on his devoted servants and loyal disciples of his Son. The “hastening” of the day could either mean to eagerly desire it or to hasten it mentally, keeping it always in view as a day that could come at any time and acting in harmony with what that day will mean for faithful believers and for those who defy God’s will. The world, or godless humans and the sphere in which they operate (a sphere consisting of “heavens and earth”), will come to an end. Its heavens will be destroyed (literally, “loosed” or dissolved) by fire, and all the elements or parts that make up the world will melt as does, for example, wax when subjected to heat from fire. (3:12)

Believers live in expectation of the fulfilment of God’s promise concerning “new heavens and a earth, wherein righteousness dwells.” (3:13) The old world, the sphere of heavens and earth in which corrupt human society operates, will be replaced by “new heavens and a new earth,” a sphere free from corruption and godlessness and where all will be conducting themselves in an upright manner. The promise concerning “new heavens and a new earth” is found in Isaiah 65:17 and 66:22. According to the context, the prophetic words of Isaiah do not signify the replacement of the earth and every other part of the vast universe. Instead, what makes the heavens and the earth new is a complete transformation, with an end to everything that brought pain, harm, and distress. (Isaiah 65:17-25) That the prophetic language does not mean a new planet is indicated by the judgment that is to befall rebels against God. Their corpses are depicted as lying in a place of refuse, where fires are kept burning and maggots feed on the bodies that the flames do not reach. If the expression “new earth” designated a new planet, this would mean that the corpses of the godless would have to be preserved from the fire that consumes the old earth and then become part of the permanent scene in

the new earth. The context simply does not justify this kind of literalism. (3:13; Isaiah 66:22-24)

3:14-18. The believer's hope and growth in grace

Verses 14-17. The incentive to growth

In view of all that his fellow believers awaited, Peter urged them as his “beloved ones” to strive being found by God (and so also by his Son the Lord Jesus Christ) as persons who are “spotless and unblemished” as well as “in peace.” In disposition, words, and deeds, believers should be spotless and unblemished, not being stained by the corruption of the godless world or blemished by having in any respect yielded to God-dishonoring conduct. For believers to be found “in peace” at the arrival of God’s day for judgment by means of his Son would require their maintaining a good relationship with him. A failure to act in keeping with their status as God’s children and disciples of his Son would alienate them from him, disrupting the peace they had come to enjoy upon being forgiven of their sins. (3:14)

While waiting for the great “day of God” and the relief from distress it promises to bring to believers, they need to be patient. Peter reminded fellow believers that the patience of “our Lord” has meant “salvation.” As he had mentioned earlier (3:9), God’s patience (which also his Son manifests) had provided the opportunity for more individuals to come to repentance and to be delivered from the condemnation to which sin leads. (3:15)

Peter referred to Paul as “our beloved brother” and then to what he had written. The context does not provide any specifics that would make it possible to identify which particular letter or letters may be linked to the words of Paul. First Peter was addressed to communities of believers in Asia Minor, providing a basis for concluding that 2 Peter was also sent to them. In that case, the letters to the Galatians, Ephesians, and Colossians could have been received by the same believers as was 2 Peter. Moreover, Paul mentioned a letter he had sent to the Laodiceans. (Colossians 4:16) This may indicate that only a portion of the letters he wrote have been preserved through copying and recopying over the centuries. Paul’s preserved letters sent to believers in Asia Minor did include comments highlighting that compassionate divine patience has made salvation possible. (Compare Ephesians 2:1-5; Colossians 1:21-23.) The things he wrote were based on the “wisdom” that had been “given him,” indicating that this wisdom had been divinely granted. (3:15)

The aspect of divine patience is mentioned in letters Paul wrote to communities of believers other than those in Asia Minor. To the Romans, for example, he

said, “Or do you despise the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience? Do you not realize that God’s kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?” (Romans 2:4, NRSV) Furthermore, various thoughts expressed in 2 Peter are found in Paul’s letters. These include comments about the return of Christ, the judgment to be expressed against the ungodly, and the necessity for believers to lead exemplary lives. Therefore, the words about Paul’s “speaking of these [things],” as he does in all his letters, could include the major points that are emphasized in 2 Peter. (3:16)

In relation to Paul’s letters, problems had arisen. Some things he had written proved to be hard to understand, and “ignorant and unstable” ones, as also in the case of the rest of the scriptures, twisted his words to their own ruin. This suggests that communities of believers who possessed copies of Paul’s letters considered them authoritative, just as they did the recognized “holy writings” that were read in the Jewish synagogues. (3:16)

Among the things that appear to have been hard to understand would have been Paul’s emphasis on freedom and on the reality that “all things” were “lawful” and “clean.” (Compare 1 Corinthians 6:12; Galatians 5:1; Titus 1:15.) What he had written was probably twisted to justify or condone base conduct. (3:16)

The “ignorant and unstable” ones likely were those who presumed to be teachers of others. They were “ignorant,” for they had no sound understanding of the subject matter but appear to have imagined that they were knowledgeable. These would-be teachers would have been unstable persons, not founded on the truth that Jesus Christ taught but enamored by their own views. Impressed with their own warped opinions, they would have been very bold when making their assertions. (Compare 1 Timothy 1:6, 7.) So it was to their own ruin (and also the ruin of anyone who might have been deluded by them) that they misused the words contained in the “holy writings” and in Paul’s letters. (3:16)

By means of the words contained in 2 Peter, the “beloved” or dear fellow believers had been forewarned about the danger posed by those who would attempt to introduce corrupt teaching. This admonition alerted devoted disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ to be on guard against being led astray with the “delusion” or deceptive teaching of the lawless ones and falling “from [their] own steadfastness.” Proponents of error were “lawless,” for they disregarded the commandment to let love govern in all their thoughts, words, and actions. Instead, they were determined to satisfy their lusts without regard for the hurtful effects on others. Their delusion doubtless included imagining that, on account of God’s great mercy, they would not be disapproved for pursuing their debased craving and for emboldening others to do likewise. Believers needed to watch out that the plausible arguments of false teachers would not sway them, causing

them to cease being steadfast in their living a life that harmonized with Jesus Christ's example and teaching. (3:17)

Verse 18. The plea for growth

To remain steadfast in their devotion, believers needed to “grow in the favor and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.” Growing in “favor” would include advancing in a life that conformed ever closer to the example of Jesus Christ so as to be the recipient of his favour in the form of continued aid and guidance. “Knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” would relate to the kind of knowledge that revealed an individual's having an approved relationship with him. The godly life of believers would prove that they belonged to him as their Lord and the Saviour who liberated them from the condemnation to which sin leads. Because of all that Jesus Christ has accomplished by surrendering his life for the human family, the prayerful expression with which 2 Peter concludes is most appropriate, “To him [be] the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen [‘So be it’ (not in all manuscripts)].” Jesus Christ is Lord, in fact, the King of kings and Lord of lords and so in possession of far greater dignity and authority that any human ruler might have. “Glory,” majesty, or splendour are rightly his, and that is the case now and will be so forever, or throughout all the endless ages to come. (3:18)

Notes:

Translators have variously rendered verse 1. The German *Neue Genfer Übersetzung* interpretively represents the two letters as serving to recall to the minds of the recipients things that would aid them to remain awake and to avoid allowing anything evil to influence their thinking. Other translations, though less interpretive, convey a variety of meanings. “This, dear friends, is now my second letter to you. In both I have been recalling to you what you already know, to rouse you to honest thought.” (REB) “Dear friends, this is now my second letter to you. I have written both of them as reminders to stimulate you to wholesome thinking.” (TNIV) “My dear friends, this is the second letter I have written you to help your honest minds remember.” (NCV) “My dear friends, this is the second letter I have written to you, trying to awaken in you by my reminders an unclouded understanding.” (NJB) “My dear friends, this is the second letter I have written to encourage you to do some honest thinking.” (CEV)

The reading “your apostles” (in verse 2) has superior manuscript support. Numerous manuscripts, however, say “our apostles.”

The reading (in verse 10) “will be found” (a form of the Greek word *eurísko*) has the support of fourth-century Codex Sinaiticus and Codex Vaticanus as well as numerous other manuscripts. Still other manuscripts say “will be burned up” or “will disappear.” One manuscript (P72, thought to date from the late third century or early fourth century CE) reads “will be found dissolved” or destroyed.

Questionnaire – Examination

1. Compare the various dangers against which Peter warns his readers with those which threaten the church and the individual at the present time.
2. Apply to the present day the teaching of 2 Peter regarding errors in doctrine and how they are to be avoided.
3. What lessons are contained in this Epistle regarding holiness of life, the Second Advent and the inspiration of Holy Scripture? Compare them with the teaching of 1 Peter.



Beneath the foundations of this octagonal Byzantine martyrium church at Capernaum, archaeologists made one of the most exciting Biblical archaeology discoveries: a simple first-century A.D. home that may have been the house of Peter, the home of Jesus in Capernaum. Photo: Garo Nalbandian

The Three Letters of John

Quick Overview

The First Letter of John

The First Epistle of John has strong external evidence concerning John's authorship. Polycarp and Papias gave strong evidence of his authorship. Internally, the author is seen to be an eyewitness (ch. 1: 01-04), with connections to the gospel of John (compare 1: 06 with 3: 21; 3: 08 with 8: 44; and 2: 16 with 8:23, etc.). First John was probably written from Ephesus in A.D. 80, probably to the churches in the area surrounding Ephesus. There were two factors in the writing of 1 John:

John wrote concerning the presence of false teachers and the spiritual carelessness of believers. He warned against the antichrists who deny the true humanity of Jesus.

John also wrote concerning the spiritual condition of the believers. Some were careless in their way of life, involving themselves with the world (2: 15-17).

John wrote to explain true fellowship with the Son.

Outline

| | |
|---|------------|
| Part One: The Source of Fellowship (1:1 – 2:27) | |
| I. Introduction | 1: 01-04 |
| II The Circumstances for Fellowship | 1:5-2:14 |
| A. Walk in the Light | 1:05-07 |
| B. Confession of Sin | 1:8-2:2 |
| C. Obedience to His Commandments | 2: 03-06 |
| D. Love for One Another | 2: 07-14 |
| III. The Cautions to Fellowship | 2: 15-27 |
| A. Love of the World | 2: 15-17 |
| B. Spirit of the Antichrist | 2: 18-27 |
| Part Two: The Behaviour of Fellowship (2:28-5:21) | |
| I. Kind of Fellowship | 2: 28-5:03 |
| A. Purity of Living | 2: 28-3:03 |
| B. Practice of Righteousness | 3:04-12 |
| C. Love in Deed and Truth | 3: 13-24 |
| D. Testing the Spirits | 4: 01-06 |
| E. Love as Christ Loved | 4:07-5:03 |
| II. Consequences of Fellowship | 5: 04-21 |
| A. Victory over the World | 5: 04-05 |

- B. Assurance of Salvation
- C. Guidance in Prayer
- D. Freedom from Ordinary Sin

5: 06-13

5: 14-17

5: 18-21

The Wisdom of John

Commonly known as the First Letter of John

Prologue

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life – the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us – that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. (1 John 1: 01-03)

God is Light

This is the message which we have seen and heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin. (1 John 1: 05-07)

Cleansing from Sin

If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us. (1 John 1: 08-10) My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world. (1 John 2: 01-02)

The Commandments our Surety

Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He who says, “I know Him,” and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is

perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him. He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked. (1 John 2: 03-06)

The Old and New Commandments

Brethren, I write no new commandment to you, but an old commandment which you have had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word which you heard from the beginning. Again, a new commandment I write to you, which thing is true in Him and in you, because the darkness is passing away, and the true light is already shining. He who says he is in the light, and hates his brother, is in darkness until now. He who loves his brother abides in the light, and there is no cause for stumbling in him. But he who hates his brother is in darkness and walks in darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes. (1 John 2: 07-11)

The Three Ages

I write to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for His name's sake. I write to you, fathers, because you have known Him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one. I write to you, little children, because you have known the Father. I write to you, fathers, because you have known Him who is from the beginning. I have written to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one. (1 John 2: 12-14)

Love of the World

Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him, because all that *is* in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passes away, and the lust of it, but he who does the will of God abides forever. (1 John 2: 15-17)

Antichrist

Little children, it is the last time. And just as you have heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have risen up, from which we know that it is the last hour. They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they were of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out so that it might be revealed that they were not all of us. But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you know all things. I have not written to you because you do not know the truth, but because you know it, and know that no lie is of the truth. Who is a liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? He who denies the Father and the Son is antichrist. Everyone who denies the Son neither has the

Father. The one confessing the Son also has the Father. Therefore what you heard from the beginning, let it abide in you. If what you heard from the beginning remains in you, you will abide in both the Son and in the Father. And this is the promise that He has promised us: everlasting life. These things I have written to you concerning those leading you astray. But the anointing which you received from Him abides in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you. But as His anointing teaches you concerning all things, and is true and no lie, and as He has taught you, abide in Him. And now, little children, abide in Him, so that when He is revealed, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him in His coming. (1 John 2: 18-28)

Sons of God

29 If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone who does righteousness has been born of Him.

1 John 3

Behold what manner of love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God. Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be. But we know that when He shall be revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope on him purifies himself, even as that One is pure. Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness, for sin is lawlessness. And you know that He was revealed that He might take away our sins, and in Him is no sin. Everyone who abides in Him does not sin. Everyone who sins has not seen Him nor known Him. Little children, let no one deceive you. He who does righteousness is righteous, even as that One is righteous. He who practices sin is of the Devil, for the Devil sins from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was revealed, that He might undo the works of the Devil. Everyone who has been born of God does not commit sin, because His seed remains in him, and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God. In this the children of God are revealed, and the children of the Devil: everyone not practicing righteousness is not of God, also he who does not love his brother. For this is the message that you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another; not as Cain who was of the evil one, and killed his brother. And for what did he kill him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother's things were righteous. (1 John 2: 29-3:12)

Love of the Brethren

Do not marvel, my brothers, if the world hates you. We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brothers. He who does not love his brother abides in death. Everyone hating his brother is a murderer. And you know that no murderer has everlasting life abiding in him. By this we have known the love of God, because He laid down His life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. But whoever has this world's goods and sees his brother having need, and shuts up his bowels from him, how does the love of God dwell in him? My children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth. And in this we shall know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before Him, that if our heart accuses us, God is greater than our heart and knows all things. Beloved, if our heart does not accuse us, we have confidence toward God. And whatever we ask, we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight. And this is His commandment that we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as He gave us commandment. (1 John 3: 13-23)

The Spirit our Surety

24 And he who keeps His commandment dwells in Him, and He in him. And by this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit which He gave to us.

1 John 4

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but try the spirits to see if they are of God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God; and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the antichrist you heard is coming, and even now is already in the world. You are of God, little children, and you have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. They are of the world, therefore they speak of the world, and the world hears them. We are of God. He who knows God hears us. The one who is not of God does not hear us. From this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error. (1 John 3: 24 – 4: 06)

Love

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God, and everyone who loves has been born of God, and knows God. The one who does not love has not known God. For God is love. In this the love of God was revealed in us, because God sent His only begotten Son into the world that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation concerning our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another. No one has seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwells in us, and His love is perfected in us. By this we know that we dwell in Him, and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit. And we have seen and testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world. Whoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwells in him and he in God. And we have known and believed the love that God has in us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him. In this is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the Day of Judgment, that as He is, so also we are in this world. There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear, because fear has torment. He who fears has not been perfected in love. We love Him because He first loved us. If anyone says, I love God, and hates his brother, he is a liar. For if he does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? And we have this commandment from Him, that he who loves God should love his brother also. (1 John 4: 07-21)

Faith

Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God. And everyone who loves Him who begets also loves him who has been born of Him. By this we know that we love the children of God, whenever we love God and keep His commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments, and His commandments are not burdensome. For everything that has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that overcomes the world, our faith. Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God? (1 John 5: 01-05)

The Three who bear witness

This is He who came through water and blood, Jesus Christ, not by water only, but by the water and blood. And the Spirit is He who bears witness, because the Spirit is the truth. For there are three that bear witness in heaven: the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit, and these three are one. And there are three that bear witness on the earth: the Spirit, and the water, and the blood; and the three are into the one. If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater. For this is the witness of God which He has testified about His Son. He who believes

on the Son of God has the witness in himself. He who does not believe God has made Him a liar, because he does not believe the record that God gave of His Son. And this is the record, that God has given to us everlasting life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. I have written these things to you who believe on the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have everlasting life, and that you may believe on the name of the Son of God. (1 John 5: 06-13)

Boldness in asking

And this is the confidence that we have toward Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of Him. If anyone sees his brother sin a sin not to death, he shall ask, and He shall give him life for those that do not sin to death. There is a sin to death, I do not say that he shall pray for it. All unrighteousness is sin, and there is a sin not to death. (1 John 5: 14-17)

Epilogue

WE KNOW that everyone who has been born of God does not continue to sin, but the one born of God guards himself, and the evil one does not touch him.

WE KNOW that we are of God, and all the world lies in evil.

And WE KNOW that the Son of God has come, and He has given us an understanding so that we may know Him who is true. And we are in Him that is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and the everlasting life. Little children, guard yourselves from idols. Amen. (1 John 5: 18-21)

The Second Letter of John

In this second epistle, there is not much external attestation; but, internal evidence suggests a similarity of structure, style, and language with John's gospel. The second epistle has terminology that identifies it with John; "truth," "walk," "new commandment," "love," and more. The epistle was probably written about A.D. 80 from Ephesus. The destination of 2 John is "the chosen lady and her children."

This could refer to:

- (a) The universal church;
- (b) A local church;
- (c) An actual lady.

By normal language usage, John was probably writing to a lady whom he knew but who is unknown to scholars today. John wrote to warn the lady (and the church that was probably meeting in her house, the “*ecclesia domestica*”) against encroaches of false teachers. The lady was hospitable and friendly, and John saw the distinct danger of the lady inviting the itinerant false teachers into her home. John warned her against showing openness to those false teachers (2 John 10).

Outline

| | | |
|-----|-----------------------------------|-------|
| I. | Abide in God’s Commandments | 01-06 |
| | A. Salutation | 01-03 |
| | B. Walk in Truth | 04 |
| | C. Walk in Love | 05-06 |
| II. | Abide Not with False Teachers | 07-13 |
| | A. Doctrine of the False teachers | 07-09 |
| | B. Avoid the False Teachers | 10-11 |
| | C. Benediction | 12-13 |

2 John

The elder to the elect lady and her children, whom I love in the truth and not only I, but also all those who have known the truth, for the sake of the truth dwelling in us, and which shall be with us forever. Grace will be with you, mercy and peace from God the Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and love. (1 John 01-03)

I rejoiced greatly that I found your children walking in truth, as we have received command from the Father. And now I beseech you, lady, not as though I wrote a new commandment to you, but that which we had from the beginning, that we love one another. And this is love, that we walk according to His commandments. This is the commandment, as you heard from the beginning, that you should walk in it. For many deceivers have entered into the world, who do not confess Jesus Christ coming in the flesh. This is the deceiver and the anti-christ. Look to yourselves, so that we may not lose those things which we worked out, but that we may receive a full reward. Everyone transgressing and not abiding in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ, he has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house, nor speak a greeting to him. For he who speaks a greeting to him is partaker of his evil

deeds. Having many things to write to you, I do not want to say with paper and ink. But I trust to come to you and speak face to face, so that our joy may be full. *The children of your elect sister greet you. Amen.* (2 John 04-13)

The Third Letter of John

The close association of epistles 2 and 3 of John relates both of these to the first epistle and demands a common authorship. Third John was likely written from Ephesus about A.D. 80. Third John is addressed to “the beloved Gaius,” unknown apart from this statement. John wrote to encourage Gaius concerning the problem of Diotrephes and to denounce the sin of Diotrephes.

Outline

| | | |
|-----|--------------------------------|-------|
| I. | The Commendation of Gaius | 01-08 |
| | A. Salutation | 01 |
| | B. Godliness of Gaius | 02-04 |
| | C. Generosity of Gaius | 05-08 |
| II. | The Condemnation of Diotrephes | 09-14 |
| | A. Pride of Diotrephes | 09-11 |
| | B. Praise for Demetrius | 12 |
| | C. Benediction | 13-14 |

3 John

The elder to Gaius the beloved, whom I love in the truth. Beloved, in regard to all things I pray that you prosper and be in health, even as your soul prospers. (3 John 01-02)

For I rejoiced greatly when the brothers came and testified of the truth that is in you, even as you walk in the truth. I have no greater joy than these things, to hear that my children walk in the truth. Beloved, you do faithfully whatever you work for the brothers and for strangers, who in love bore witness of you before the church, whom you will do well to send forward worthily of God; because they went forth for His name's sake, taking nothing from the nations. Therefore we ought to entertain such, so that we might be co-workers in the truth. I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to have the pre-eminence among them, did not receive us. Therefore if I come, I will remember his deeds which he does, ranting against us with evil words. And not content with these, neither does he himself receive the brothers. And he forbids those who would, and casts them out of the church. Beloved, do not imitate the bad, but the good. He who does good is from God, but he who does evil has not seen God. Demetrius has good report by all, and by the truth itself. And we also bear witness, and you

know that our witness is true. I had many things to write, but I will not write to you with pen and ink, but I trust I shall shortly see you, and we shall speak face to face. Peace be to you. *The friends greet you. Greet the friends by name.*(3 John 03-14)

The Johannine Letters Commentary

By Arno C. Gaebelein (Public domain)

First John - Introduction

This Epistle is not addressed to any one church nor does it mention, like the other New Testament Epistles, the author of the document; it is anonymous. We are not left in doubt who penned this Epistle in spite of its anonymous character. There can be no question that the author of the fourth Gospel is also the author of this Epistle. Its opening statement is linked with the opening of the Gospel and throughout it is written in the thought and language of the fourth Gospel. Inasmuch, then, as that Gospel is indisputably the work of John the Apostle, this Epistle is also the work of his inspired pen. "The internal testimony furnished by this Epistle to its author being the same with the author of the fourth Gospel is, it may well be thought, incontrovertible. To maintain a diversity of authorship would betray the very perverseness and exaggeration of that school of criticism which refuses to believe, be evidence never so strong" (Alford).

Historical Evidence

While the internal testimony confirms conclusively the Johannine authorship of the Epistle there is also a mass of historical evidence which attributes the Epistle to the beloved disciple. The oldest testimony is that of Polycarp, who was personally acquainted with the Apostle John. We refer to the introduction of the Gospel of John where we give fuller information on Polycarp and his testimony to the fourth Gospel. He makes, in one of his writings, a direct reference to 1 John 4:3, in fact, he quotes this verse almost verbatim. It is, therefore, a testimony to the genuineness and the authorship of this Epistle. Irenaeus, the disciple of Polycarp, frequently quotes the Epistle of John and states that it is John's. Notable is the reference in his work against heresies as quoted by Eusebius. He cites John 20:31 and connects it with 1 John 2:18 and 1 John 4:1-3 and 1 John 5:1. After these two witnesses, Polycarp, who knew John, and Irenaeus, the disciple of Polycarp, every authority among the church fathers mentions this Epistle as being the work of John the Apostle.

It is not necessary to quote all these references--by Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, Cyprian, Origen, Dionysius of Alexandria, Eusebius, Jerome, and

many others. We mention but one more of the ancient testimonies, that which is found in the Muratorian fragment. This old and very reliable source of the second century has in it the following paragraph: "What wonder is it, then, that John brings forward each detail with so much emphasis, even in this Epistle, saying of himself, "What we have seen with our eyes, and heard with our ears, and our hands have handled, these things have we written to you. For so he professes that he was not only an eye-witness, but a hearer, and, moreover, a historian of all the wonderful works of the Lord in order.

In harmony with this evidence is the testimony of the oldest fourth century Greek manuscripts, which give the title of the Epistle as "Joannou-A"--that is--"John 1:1-51." Its rejection by the Gnostic Marcion is of no importance, for he excluded from the Scriptures all the writings of the Apostle because they deal a death-blow to his anti-Christian inventions. Lucke, one of the great scholars of bygone days, states that the Gospel of John and the Epistles of John are the genuine works of the apostle, and he adds, "Incontestably, then, our Epistle must be numbered among those canonical books which are most strongly upheld by ecclesiastical tradition."

It is, therefore, not necessary in face of such internal and external evidences to state the objections of destructive critics like Scaliger, S.G. Lange, Bretschneider and the Tubingen school. As it is with other portions of Scripture they have no case at all in attacking the authorship of this Epistle.

When And Where It Was Written

The Epistle itself gives no definite answer to these questions. Some have attempted to fix the date as being before the destruction of Jerusalem in the year 70 A.D. They base their assumption on 1 John 2:18 and claim that "the last time" means the closing days for Jerusalem, which is incorrect. The term, "the last time," has in this Epistle the same meaning as in 1 Timothy 4:1 and 2 Timothy 3:1, and therefore does not mean the last days before the city of Jerusalem was destroyed. But it is clear that John wrote the fourth Gospel record first and his Epistle was written after the Gospel, so that the Epistle was written possibly about the year 90, preceding the Revelation, which was written about the year 96.

Irenaeus states that the Gospel was written by John in Ephesus ; an ancient tradition states that the Epistle was written from the same place.

To Whom Was It Written

The fact that this Epistle starts, unlike the other Epistles, without any address, introductory greeting or closing salutation, has led some to call it a treatise and not an Epistle. But the personal address and appeal, the style throughout fully sustains the epistolar character. Others, again, have termed the Epistle a second part of the Gospel (Michaelis), while others speak of it as an introduction to the Gospel. That the Epistle is closely related to the Gospel is very true, but that does not necessitate a closer external relationship.

Dr. Bullinger, in the Companion Bible, suggests that this Epistle also was originally addressed to believing Hebrews in the dispersion. This view was held by others before him (Benson and others); but there is nothing whatever in the Epistle to warrant such a conclusion. On account of a remark by Augustinus on 1 John 3:2 that John wrote “to the Parthians many commentators have adopted this view, which is, however, without any foundation whatever. The Epistle was evidently not addressed to any one church but to believers in a number of assemblies. John was acquainted with these believers, who seemed to have been mostly Gentile converts. (See 1 John 5:21). If the tradition is true that the Epistle was written in Ephesus, it is not improbable that it was sent to the seven churches in the province of Asia, Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea, the churches to whom the Lord sent the messages a few years later when John was in Patmos .

The Purpose of the Epistle

The purpose of the Epistle is stated by the writer in two places; “These things write we unto you that your joy may be full” (1 John 1:4). “These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God” (1 John 5:13). According to the Gospel of John (John 20:31), this also is the purpose of the Gospel. He writes to those who believe on the Son of God and who have that eternal life which was manifested in the Lord Jesus, and which is imparted to all who believe on the Son of God and which establishes fellowship with the Father and the Son. The Epistle has been rightly called a family letter, that is, believers are viewed as the family of God, hence the repeated use of the word *teknia*, children. The Gospel of John was written on account of the false teachings concerning the Person of Christ, which began in the second half of the first century. (See Introduction to John’s Gospel.)

The Epistle of John is very outspoken against those errors touching the deity of the Lord Jesus Christ and His sacrificial work. They flourished later under the name of Gnosticism, Docetism, Montanism and others. Marcion, a Gnostic

leader, when Polycarp, the disciple of John met him, was addressed by Polycarp with these words, "I know thee, thou firstborn of Satan." While these evil doctrines and denials were not yet fully developed in John's day, they existed and increased, hence the warnings in 1 John 2:18-25 and 1 John 4:1-6. What anti-christianity is will be learned from these passages. All the evil systems of today, which are sweeping with increasing force through Christendom towards their divinely appointed and revealed doom are exposed in this Epistle in their true character. Christian Science, falsely so called; the liberal theology, which denies that Christ is the virgin-born Son of God, the modern religion, the destructive criticism and other systems and cults are all branded by John as antichrists. These many antichrists are finally to be merged into a personal antichrist, the man of sin. Our annotations will enlarge upon all this.

The Message of the Epistle

The Epistle has a deep spiritual message for the children of God. As already stated, the Epistle, like the Gospel of John, witnesses to Christ as the Son of God and the eternal life which He is Himself and which He imparts to the believer. Thus the Epistle opens, "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and our hands have handled, of the Word of life. (And the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us.) That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ."

The great truth which is developed by the Holy Spirit is not so much the life which the believer has in Christ, that is, the eternal life imparted unto him, but it is that life which is in the believer, and the manifestation of that life, a manifestation of the same characteristics as manifested by the Lord Jesus Christ in His blessed life. As born of God, believers have God as their Father, they are children of God. God is light and God is love and, therefore, those who are born of God, in whom there is eternal life, must also manifest light and love, walk in righteousness and in love. This is the message of the First Epistle of John. All the blessed things which cluster around it we shall discover in our analysis and annotations.

The Division of The First Epistle of John

The divisions of the First Epistle of John have always been considered a difficulty, so that leading expositors of the past have expressed the belief that there is no contextual connection at all in the Epistle. Calvin shares this belief as well as others. Bengel in his great work "The Gnomen" maintained that there is

a logical and contextual arrangement. He divided the Epistle in three parts, naming them in Latin as follows:

I. Exordium--Introduction 1:1-4.

II. Tractatio--Treatment and discussion 1:5-5:12

III. Conclusio--Conclusion 5:13-21.

The Numerical Bible gives also a three-fold division.

I. God as Light and in the light and the light in us: 1-2:11.

II. Growth by the truth, which is nothing else but the light manifested: 2:12-27.

III. The manifestation of the children of God by the fruit found: 2:28-5.

This is a helpful arrangement. The Scofield Bible gives two main divisions. I. The Family with the Father: 1-3:24. II. The Family and the world: 4-5.

We divide the Epistle into six sections as follows:

I. THE LIFE MANIFESTED (1:1-4)

II. LIGHT AND DARKNESS AND THE TESTS (1:5-2:17)

III. ERROR AND TRUTH (2:18-27)

IV. RIGHTEOUSNESS AND LOVE AS MANIFESTED BY THE CHILDREN OF GOD (2:28-3:18)

V. HEREBY WE KNOW (3:19-5:13)

VI. THE CONCLUSION (5:14-21)

Emphasis of John and Paul Compared

| John | Paul |
|---|-----------------------------|
| Emphasis of John | And Paul compared |
| Regeneration | Justification |
| Sonship in the family | Membership in the body |
| Sin as a child's offense | Sin as unworthy of position |
| Against the Father | In Christ |
| Our private relation as children of the Father | Our public position as sons |

The Teaching of Both Apostles

In a work like this we could not deal with all the doctrines taught by John which agree with the teachings of Paul, for that would be too extensive, but we will look at some of the most obvious.

Already we have pointed out the thoughts of both regarding the Trinity, but now we shall look more at the practical behaviour each would expect to find in the believers. The highest standard attainable by man is his conformity to the ways of God. Reproducing the features of His character is the supreme object of all teaching. Throughout John's writings, especially in his epistles, he keeps stressing the idea that the children of God should be like their Father. He is righteous, so those born of Him are righteous (1 John 2:29), He is light, so those who are His walk in the light (1 John 1:7), He is love, so we ought to love one another (1 John 4:11), and God is spirit, so we ought to worship Him in Spirit (John 4:24).

Paul in like manner frequently stresses the point that God's children should reflect His character. In the words, "Be ye followers (imitators) of God, as dear children; walk in love" (Eph 5:1-2), he enjoins us to love as God loves; God is light, so he speaks of us as "children of light" (1 Thess 5:5); God is Spirit, so he teaches that we "worship God in the Spirit" (Phil 3:3): and God is righteous, so he claims that "the righteousness of the law is fulfilled in us" (Rom 8:4).

Assembly Letters They Wrote

It is interesting to compare the seven letters John wrote to the seven churches of Asia, and the seven letters Paul wrote to seven churches. It might be impossible to link these together by saying which one in John's list compares specially with a particular one written by Paul. Both men wrote to Ephesus, so we have no

problem linking the two letters together. It is interesting to note the references to love in Ephesians, especially the closing words, "Grace be with all those that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity (incorruption)" and the charge made in the letter of Revelation 2, "Thou hast left thy first love" (v 4). The assembly at Laodicea likewise received communication from both, for the letter to the Colossians was also to be read by the saints at Laodicea. We might compare the letter to Smyrna and the two letters to the Thessalonians, for in both cases the saints were suffering persecution and were in need of comfort. As for the remaining four, we may not be very clear, but there are some links between the letter to Thyatira and the letters to Corinth, for both deal with eating things sacrificed to idols, and with the sin of fornication. The letter to Philadelphia might be put against the epistle to Philippi, for there is no sharp rebuke in either, and in both we have a reference to the "crown".

The Prophetic Outlook of Both Apostles

Those seeking light on future events, immediately turn their attention to the writings of John, especially to the Book of Revelation, but it is surprising how closely Paul writes and predicts many things which are more extensively developed by John. All are agreed that in the synoptic Gospels, the future events are connected with the sermon of Mount Olivet, and that the stress in that sermon is on the earthly side of things, How different with John, for he records the Lord's wonderful promise to His own, "I will come again and receive you unto myself" (John 14:3). In this promise we have the "rapture" referred to, for it is not Christ coming down to earth to set up His kingdom, but rather His coming to take His own to the many mansions. This promise is likewise in view when we read, "Behold I come quickly"; "Behold I come quickly and my reward is with me"; "The Spirit and the bride say, Come", and when John himself says, "Even so come Lord Jesus" (Rev 22:7-20). The favorite word used by Paul for the coming is "parousia", but it is only once used by John in his writings (1 John 2:28). Paul sheds more light on this wonderful moment, for in 1 Thessalonians 4, he shows that the Lord will descend, and that the dead will be raised and the living saints will be changed and will rise with them to meet the Lord in the air, so together they will enter the Father's house. This same promise is found in John's writings, when he says "When He shall appear, we shall be like Him for we shall see Him as He is" (1 John 3:2).

Surely both men have words of comfort for those who are bereaved. Closely linked with this appearing is the day of rewards. As we have seen, the Lord brings His reward with Him, in 1 John we are exhorted to live so as "not to be ashamed at his coming" (1 John 2:28), and a further warning is given to the church of Philadelphia, "Hold that fast that thou hast, that no man take thy

crown" (Rev 3:11). It is all but needless to mention the many occasions in Paul's writings where he draws attention to this day of review. He, himself, lived in light of it and when his end is reached he is confident that he will receive the expected crown. Thoughts of this future prospect are expected to produce service and holy living in the lives of the saints (1 John 3:3 and 2 Tim 4:1).

Not only in the future for the saints do these two writers closely compare, but what is more surprising is the agreement that appears between them as to the future events on earth. Both writers warn us of the apostasy which will follow the rapture of the saints, which will precede the establishment of Christ's kingdom. John makes clear that even in this age there are antichrists who bear some resemblance to the coming Antichrist. And Paul likewise makes clear that in these last days there are those who will "have a form of godliness, yet deny the power thereof" (2 Tim 3:5). Some have looked at 2 Thessalonians 2 as a miniature of Revelation, but it cannot be doubted that the "man of sin," the "Antichrist" and the beast from the land Revelation 13 are one and the same person. He is also called by John "the false prophet". He will not only be an opposer of Christ, but an imitator of Him. John records Christ's words concerning this man, "another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive" (John 5:43). Like the Lord, he will claim to be God, and at the same time direct worship to the first beast. However he will enter the rebuilt Temple and direct the religion of the apostate Jewish people in the land. Just as the Lord performed miracles, so he too, will do wonders, and these will likely help to blind the minds of his followers.

The Lord's coming to reign on the earth is wonderfully described by John as One riding upon a white horse, with a sword in His mouth with which He will smite His enemies, and remove from the kingdom all that is contrary to His righteous character. Then He will rule as "King of kings, and Lord of lords" (Rev 19:11-16). This same scene is described by Paul when he writes, "The Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven...taking vengeance on them that know not God" (1 Thess 1:7-8). While the risen and changed saints will not come down to dwell on earth in their celestial bodies, yet they will "live and reign with Christ a thousand years" (Rev 20:4). Paul also reminds us "if we suffer with Him we shall also reign with Him" (2 Tim 2:12).

At the end of the thousand years, John shows us the earth and heaven fleeing away and the eternal state with the new heavens and the new earth commencing, and it is interesting to note that Paul also takes us into the same eternal state. He shows the Lord reigning until He has subdued every foe, then handing back to the Father the purged dominion, so that the triune God will be all in all (1 Cor 15:24-28.) Though Paul was not with Christ to hear the Olivet address, nor had

he the wondrous revelation granted to John, yet it is interesting to see that in his knowledge of the main events of the future he was not behind his fellow apostle.

The Apostates

There is another solemn matter that appears in the writings of these two apostles which also shows the closeness of the relationship between them. It is the fact that there are those who profess to be saved, and continue for a time, but later proved to be deceivers. The persons referred to are not simply those sinners who thought they had received salvation, and later found out they had made a mistake, for such have often been really saved at a later time. The persons mentioned in 1 John 2 and in Hebrews 6 are such that all hope of their repentance is entirely absent. John views them as antichrists, and as those for whom prayer cannot be made (1 John 2:18-19); and Paul sees them as those who have crucified Christ afresh, and as those who have forsaken the company of the saints, and trodden underfoot the Son of God (Heb 6:6; 10:25-26). John had vivid memories of Judas, who was an example of these, and Paul also had deep sorrow as he thought of those who once walked with him, and had turned out to be enemies of the cross of Christ.

Archaeological Light on John and the Qumran Community

The Qumran document The Community Rule (1QS)³ shows similarities in thought with the NT work of 1 John. While not necessarily indicating dependence, reading these works together can sharpen one's understanding to

³ The **Community Rule** (1QS), which was previously referred to as the **Manual of Discipline** and in Hebrew *Serekh ha-Yahad*, is one of the first scrolls to be discovered near *khirbet* (ruin of) Qumran, the scrolls found in the eleven caves between 1947 and 1954 are now referred to simply as the Dead Sea Scrolls. The Rule of the Community is a key sectarian document and is seen as definitive for classifying other compositions as sectarian or non-sectarian (1QpHabakkuk; 1QM; the Hodayot; and CD are other core sectarian documents). Among the nearly 350 documents (900+ manuscripts) discovered, roughly 30% of the scrolls are classified as "sectarian". The most complete manuscript of the Community Rule was found in Cave 1, and was first called the Manual of Discipline by Millar Burrows. It is now designated 1QS (which stands for : "Cave 1 / Qumran / "Serekh" = 'rule'). Numerous other fragments of this document, containing variant readings, were found in caves 4 and 5 (4QS^{a-j}, 5Q11, 5Q13). Two other documents, known as the Rule of the Congregation (1QSa) and the Rule of the Blessing (1QSB), are found on the same scroll as 1QS and while they were originally thought to be part of the Community Rule are now considered separate compositions and appendices.

what is meant by each. Having these texts converse with one another on three topics will show how similar ideas can be communicated through varied wording. The reader should also see nuances of meaning more clearly in differing vantage points. Thus, in reading 1 John and 1QS together a sharper interpretation should emerge benefiting New Testament and Dead Sea Scroll study.

The first topic is the light and darkness motif present in both documents. The stark dualism reveals a means of bifurcation in ideas or groups. Both the Johannine community and Qumran identify their own group as the light. In 1QS 1:10 the members are called to love the sons of light. Though 1 John does not use this exact term in 1:5-7 God is identified as light and those walking in light are in mutual fellowship with others of the community. Thus, John's community, titled "children of God" (3:1, 2, 10), is also of the light.

The majority of the other references of 1QS to light and darkness are a means of describing members' movement away from the community's teachings. In 1QS 3 the ones away from the community may be looking for light but turn to darkness. These ones turning to darkness would then be subject to the hatred reserved for the sons of darkness in 1QS 1:10. The proportional response of love to those of the light is matched with hatred to those of darkness. These competing worlds are said to have distinct walks of light and darkness and led by leaders, the Prince of Light and Angel of Darkness respectively (1QS 3:20). The God of Israel is identified as on the side of the light in 1QS 3:25.

In 1 John God is also marked on the side of light as mentioned before and said to have no darkness at all (1:5). The call to love those of the light is profound in this document. The love for other brothers is a mark of belonging in the Johannine community (3:23; 4:7, 11, 21). Darkness is the opposing lifestyle to the light of the community; however, hatred is never mentioned as the appropriate response. The changing from darkness to light is occurring (2:8) and those that are hating a brother are in darkness (2:9). Hatred for the Johannine community is a mark of walking in darkness (2:11).

The second topic is on the means of cleansing from impurity. The Qumran document describes a cleansing from sins occurring through union with God's truth. Cleanliness will come when one's flesh is sprinkled with purifying waters (1QS 3:5ff). The scope of the expiation is stated as all of one's sins and will allow one to "contemplate the light of life" (1QS 3:5). Spirits appear to be involved in the cleansing process. Designations such as "spirit of holiness, spirit of truth, and spirit of purification" are all used in describing the purification process (1QS 4:20ff).

1 John also addresses cleansing from sin or impurity but in a briefer form. Jesus Christ is presented as the means of propitiation (2:2). Stated more directly in 1:7 the blood of Jesus brings about the cleansing. The only stated process in 1 John is the confession of sin, which will result in forgiveness and cleansing (1:9). The scope of the cleansing is for all of one's sins, though the potential subject is expanded in 2:2 to not only the immediate community but also the sins of the whole world. John's Spirit is not explicitly linked to the cleansing work. The Spirit is said to have been given by Jesus as a proof of being in Jesus (3:24). The language of "in Jesus" is synonymous with the cleansing action (2:5). God is also said to have loved the community demonstrated in sending Jesus for the propitiating sins. Thus, it links his involvement in the cleansing as well (4:10).

The final topic concerns community members that stumble. This stumbling language is consistent for both communities (1 Jn. 2:9; 1QS 2:10ff). The stumbling motif involves actions of non-conformity with the community and potentially separation from the community. The stumbling is seen as a result of deceiving spirits. The Qumran document talks of a spirit of falsehood driving one to evil deeds (1QS 4:10ff). Those who walk in these evil deeds will receive damnation and torment from God. 1 John warns community members to test spirits, so as not to follow the spirit of error (4:1-6). Antichrists are also involved in lying that Jesus is not the Christ (2:18ff). The lie is to be renounced to avoid being deceived.

Following these spirits leads community members to deeds of darkness. The Community Rule states dark deeds such as greed, slackness, lies, and pride as the by-products of being led astray (1QS 4:10ff). Lust is mentioned as a deed of darkness, which was poignantly addressed in the community initiation in 1QS 1:5. Those joining were instructed to no longer follow a sinful heart, lustful eyes, or commit all manner of evil. 1 John more commonly refers to dark deeds as sin (1:6-8). Sin in 1 John is identified commonly with hatred (2:9,11; 3:10,15;) and lying (1:6,8; 2:21-22; 5:10). These are united in 4:20-21 as both hatred and lying are core sins which call one's love God for God into question. The community is instructed to not love the world with the similar concept of lust of the eyes (2:16) along with the lust of the flesh and the pride of life.

Finally, the draw on community members is described as idolatry leading to separation. Idols vie for the commitment of members in Qumran causing backsliding (1QS 2:10-15). Ultimately, these idols can bring a member to being cut off from the community and cursed (1QS 2:15-20). Thus, members are told detesting idols is a positive trait for members (1QS 4:5ff). In 1 John community members mark those who leave their ranks as a sign of their non-commitment (2:19). The separation appears to be chosen by the individual and not the

collective. The sin leading to death might also be seen as a separation mechanism of the community (5:16-17). Similarly to Qumran, the Johannine community is warned of idols implicitly as a source of stumbling (5:21).

Though similarities abound in these two works, the differences come into focus through this exercise. 1 John 's process of cleansing and community responsibilities seem very different from Qumran. The underlying Trinitarianism of 1 John is clearly opposed to the theological framework of The Community Rule. A sharpened interpretation of 1 John is a benefit of its conversation with 1QS.

Commentary Letter 1 John

Chapter 1

I. THE LIFE MANIFESTED

CHAPTER 1:1-4 – The basis of fellowship

Verses 1-2. The incarnation and eternal life

Verses 3-4. The incarnation and fellowship

The opening verses of this Epistle are very precious and are the key to the whole Epistle. Three Scriptures speak of what was in the beginning. “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Genesis 1:1). This is the beginning of all things which God called into existence out of nothing. “in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1:1). This takes us beyond the first verse of the Bible. It reveals Him, by whom and for whom God created all things, in His eternal existence with God and as God.

The third Scripture is the first verse of John's Epistle. “That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, the Word of life.” This is a different beginning from the beginning in Genesis 1:1 and John 1:1; it means the manifestation of the Son of God in incarnation among men. He, who is the true God and the eternal life, the life and light, was manifested as man here below. This truth is stated by John in his Gospel in the fourteenth verse (John 1:14) of the first chapter: “And the Word was made flesh and tabernacled among us (and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the Only Begotten of the Father), full of grace and truth.” To this John refers in the first statement of his Epistle. John and his fellow-disciples had walked with Him and talked with Him.

It must be noted that the apostle speaks of Him as “the Word of Life”; he does not say therefore “who was from the beginning” but, which was from the beginning. First he mentions what they had heard; but one may hear a person and not be near to that person. But they were closer to the Word of Life, he writes, “which we have seen with our eyes”; yet one may have seen a person without being close to that person; but they had more than a passing vision “which we have contemplated” which is more than a mere seeing, it denotes gazing with a purpose, with a desire and with admiration. A statement of still greater nearness follows, “our hands have handled”--John and the other disciples had known Him, the Word of Life, intimately.

“And the Life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life which was with the Father, and hath been manifested unto us.” He whom they heard, with whom they were in touch, whom they knew and gazed upon is the eternal Life which was with the Father. It is more than that He spoke of eternal Life and promised eternal Life; He Himself is eternal Life. He was with the Father and came into the world, to manifest what that life is. While He manifested the Father, as He witnessed “whosoever seeth Me seeth the Father,” He also displayed as man what eternal life is in His blessed and perfect life He lived on earth. And this eternal life is communicated to all who believe on the Son of God. This life which was with the Father, manifested in the Lord Jesus on earth, is the life which is in us. (“The life has been manifested. Therefore we have no longer to seek for it, to grope after it in the darkness, to explore at random the indefinite, or the obscurity of our own hearts, in order to find it, to labour fruitlessly under the law, in order to obtain it. We behold it: it is revealed, it is here, in Jesus Christ. He who possesses Christ possesses that life.”) To know then what life we possess as believers, we must not look in ourselves, or to other believers, but to Christ and the life He manifested on earth. As another has said, “When I turn my eyes to Jesus, when I contemplate all His obedience, His purity, His grace, His tenderness, His patience, His devotedness, His holiness, His love, His entire freedom from all self seeking, I can say, that is my life. It may be that it is obscured in me; but it is none the less true, that it is my life.”

“That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us, and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ. And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full.”

What they had seen and heard they have declared unto others, to those who also believe on Him, so that they too might share in the same fellowship, the fellowship of the Father and His Son Jesus Christ. The life which believers possess, the eternal life given through grace, the life He manifested on earth and

which is in us, fits us for fellowship with both the Father and the Son. What such a fellowship demands and the tests of it are developed subsequently. To have such fellowship, bestowed through grace, is the blessed calling of all the saints of God. Such fellowship is eternal life and there is nothing beyond that in heaven itself, while we enjoy it here the fullness of it will be enjoyed in glory. But what is fellowship with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ? It is but little understood in its real meaning. Fellowship means having things in common. The Father's delight is in Him who pleased Him so perfectly. For the Father, His blessed Son is the One altogether lovely.

Believers knowing the Son also find their delight in Him; He is for our hearts the One altogether lovely. As we then delight ourselves in Him, in His obedience, in what He is in love and devotion to the Father, we share the same feelings and thoughts with the Father, which is fellowship with the Father. Whenever the believer praises and thanks the Father for His Son, tells the Father of his deep appreciation of Him, how he loves Him, longs to be more like Him, walk even as He walked, then he is in fellowship with the Father. And the Son has given to us the knowledge of the Father. "No man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and to whomsoever the Son will reveal Him" (Matthew 11:27). It is the Gospel of John where the blessed words of the Son concerning the Father are recorded. He manifested unto His own the name of the Father.

In the five chapters in the Gospel of John, beginning with the feet-washing and ending with the great intercessory prayer of our Lord (13-17) the word "Father" occurs fifty times. It is in this part of the Gospel the Son makes known the Father. Through the Son we have the knowledge of the Father and the knowledge of the Father's love. His delight was to glorify the Father in a life of devotion and obedience. And as the believer delights Himself in the Father, honors Him and yields obedience to Him, he has fellowship with the Son, has the same thing in common with the Son. Fellowship with the Father and with the Son is therefore not a feeling or some extraordinary experience.

"All this flows, whether in the one or the other point of view, from the Person of the Son. Herein our joy is full. What can we have more than the Father and the Son? What more perfect happiness than community of thoughts, feelings, joys and communion with the Father and the Son, deriving all our joy from themselves? And if it seem difficult to believe, let us remember that, in truth, it cannot be otherwise; for, in the life of Christ, the Holy Ghost is the source of my thoughts, feelings, communion, and He cannot give thoughts different from those of the Father and the Son. They must be in their nature the same. To say that they are adoring thoughts is in the very nature of things, and only makes

them more precious. To say that they are feeble and often hindered, while the Father and the Son are divine and perfect, is, if true, to say the Father and the Son are God, are divine, and we feeble creatures. That surely none will deny. But if the blessed Spirit be the source, they must be the same as to nature and fact.

This is our Christian position then, here below in time, through the knowledge of the Son of God; as the apostle says, “These things write we unto you, that your joy may be full” (John N. Darby).

Verses 5-17

II. LIGHT AND DARKNESS AND THE TESTS

CHAPTERS 1:5-2:17

- 1. God is light; walking in darkness and in light (1 John 1:5-7)*
- 2. What the light manifests (1 John 1:8-10)*
- 3. The advocacy of Christ to maintain the fellowship (1 John 2:1-2)*
- 4. The tests of fellowship (1 John 2:3-17)*

1:5-10. The condition of fellowship

Verses 5-8. Walking in the light

Verses 9-10. Confessing our sins

1 John 1:5-7

The message they had heard of Him and which they declared to others is, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. Light, perfect, pure light is God's nature; He is absolutely holy, with no darkness in Him at all. That God is light was manifested in the life of the Lord Jesus, for He was and is holy. Fellowship with the Father and the Son means, therefore, to have fellowship with light, and that excludes a walk in darkness. “if we say that we have fellowship with Him and walk in darkness we lie and do not the truth.” If one professes to have fellowship with God and walks in darkness, he lies, for darkness can have no fellowship with light. “But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin.”

But what is this walk in the light? It is not the same thing as walking according to the light. It does not mean to live a perfect and sinless life. Walking in the

light is not the question of how we wait but where we walk, and the place where the believer walks is the light. It means to walk daily in His presence, with our will and conscience in the light and presence of God, judging everything that does not answer to that light. Whatever is not right is brought at once in His presence, exposed to the light, confessed, judged and put away. Such is the walk in the light which fellowship with God demands. The result of such a walk in the light is mutual fellowship among believers, because each has the same nature of God and the same Spirit, the same Christ as the object before the heart and the same Father. It cannot be otherwise. Then there is another thing stated, "The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin." Walking in the light shows us what we are and we cannot say that we have no sin. But we have no consciousness of sin resting upon us before a holy God, though we know that sin is in us, but we have the assurance of being cleansed from it by His precious blood. Such is the blessed position of a true Christian. Fellowship with the Father and with His Son, walking in the light as He is in the light, fellowship one with another and the cleansing power of the blood.

1 John 1:8-10.

The light makes known that sin is in us. If the believer, the child of God, says that he has no sin, the light contradicts him. If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. The denial of sin within is a delusion. This evil teaching that the old Adamic nature is eradicated in the believer is widespread in our day among Holiness, Pentecostal and other sects. True spirituality is to confess daily, walking in the light, that in our flesh there dwelleth no good thing. And if sin is committed it needs confession. He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

The light also manifests another evil, the claim of a sinless perfection. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His Word is not in us. Some have applied this verse to the unsaved; it has nothing to do with the sinner, but relates to a true believer, who in presumption makes the claim that he lives without sinning. And the reason why children of God make such unscriptural claims is inattention to His Word, for the Word makes manifest what sin is, and the Apostle says "If we say that we have not sinned ... His word is not in us."

2:1-2. The advocacy of Christ and fellowship

Verse 1. Fellowship maintained Godward by Christ's advocacy

Verse 2. The efficacy of Christ's advocacy

1 John 2:1-2.

For the first time John uses the endearing term “my little children”, meaning the born ones of God, who are born into the family of God by having believed on the Son of God. One might conclude, inasmuch as belief in the eradication of the old nature and sinless perfection is a delusion, that the child of God must sin. But, while sin is within, and a sinless perfection is beyond our reach, it does not mean that the believer should continue in sin. He had written these things that they might not sin. But if any man sin a gracious provision has been made. Let it be noticed that the application, as it is often done, to the sinner who is outside, who knows not Christ at all, is totally wrong. It means the little children, the members of the family of God. If any true child of God sins we have an advocate with the Father (not God, it is the matter of the family), Jesus Christ the righteous. The advocacy of Christ restores the sinning believer to the communion with the Father and the Son which sin interrupted. He does not wait till we come repenting and confessing, but in the very moment we have sinned He exercises His blessed office as our Advocate with the Father and His intercession produces in us repentance, confession, and self-judgment. Thus we are maintained by Himself in the fellowship into which the grace of God has called and brought us.

When the believer sins it does not mean that he has lost his salvation. Many a child of God has been harassed through ignorance, and imagined that he committed the unpardonable sin. The sin of a believer does not make him unsaved or lost, but it makes fellowship with the Father and the Son impossible till the sin is judged and confessed. This is accomplished by His advocacy.

“The Lord Jesus as much lives to take up the failure of His own, as He died to put away their sins by His blood. This, too, is founded on propitiation; but there is besides the blessed fact that He is the righteousness of the believer in the presence of God. His one expiatory sacrifice avails in abiding value; His place is before God as our righteousness; and there for the failing He carries on His living active advocacy with the Father.”

2:3-6. Obedience and fellowship

Verses 3-5. Assurance of being in fellowship

Verse 6. The duty of the believer claiming to be in fellowship

2:7-11. Brotherly love and fellowship

Verses 7-8. Love, the expression of fellowship

Verses 9-11. Hatred, the denial of fellowship

2:12-14. Spiritual maturity and fellowship

Verse 12. The Father's family

Verses 13-14. Fellowship and Christian growth

2:15-17. The peril of worldliness and fellowship

Verse 15a. The peril warned against

Verses 15b-17. The reason for the warning

1 John 2:3-17.

John now writes of the characteristics of the life which the believer has received, the eternal life and applies certain tests. The profession of a Christian is that He knows God. But how do we know that we know Him? The answer is, "If we keep His commandments." This is not legality in the least which puts the believer back under the law. John knows nothing of that. Obedience is the leading trait of the imparted life. It is set on doing the will of God. Christ walked on earth in obedience; His meat and drink was to do the will of Him that sent Him. Inasmuch as His life is in us as believers, it must manifest itself in obedience to the will of God. It is the same which we find in 1 Peter 1:2, sanctified, or set apart, unto the obedience of Jesus Christ. It is not a sinless obedience as it was in Him; while the believer has his heart set on obeying the Lord and doing His will, he often fails and stumbles, but he continues to aim at doing the will of God, for that is the nature of the new life. "He that saith, I know Him, and keepeth not His commandments, is a liar and the truth is not in him. But whoso keepeth His Word, in him verily is the love of God perfected; hereby know we that we are in Him."

One who professes to know God and does not manifest obedience is no Christian at all, but he is a liar, and the truth in the knowledge of the Lord is lacking in such a one. He is a mere professing Christian, one who has the outward form of godliness but does not know the power of it, because he has not the life in him, which is His life and in which he delights to obey. The first great test of the reality of the divine life in the believer is obedience.

Then follows a second test: "He that saith he abideth in Him ought himself also so to walk, even as He walked." In His prayer our Lord told the Father, "They are not of the world even as I am not of the world"; and again, "As Thou has sent me into the world so have I sent them into the world" (John 17:16; John

17:18). Believers are not of the world as He is not of the world, because they are born again and have His life in them. They are in Him, abiding in Him, and therefore they must walk as He walked, which does not mean to be what He was, for He was without sin, but it is a walk after His own pattern, the reproduction of His character and life through the power of the Holy Spirit.

In the next two verses we read of the old commandment and of the new commandment (1 John 2:7-8). The old commandment is explained, as the word which they had heard from the beginning, that is, the same beginning as mentioned in 1 John 1:1, the manifestation of Christ on earth. But what is the commandment of which he speaks next? It is something new now, for the life which was in Him on earth is in believers now. Therefore, it is true in Him and in us because the darkness is passing away and the true light already shineth. Christ is life and light and as His life is in us we share it in Him; this is that which is new. It was true of Him first, and now it is true of us, too.

This is followed by another test. "He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother is in darkness even until now." The life must manifest itself in love. Light and love go together; both are manifested in Christ, He was light and love. If He is, therefore, in the believer, and he possesses that life, and professes to be in the light, and with such a profession hateth his brother, he shows thereby that he is in the darkness until now. Love cannot be separated from that life and light which was in Him and which is in us as believers. He that abideth in the light loveth his brother and because he does there is no occasion of stumbling in him. In him who loves there is neither darkness nor occasion of stumbling; in him who does not love there is both darkness and stumbling. He who hates his brother is a stumbling block to himself and stumbles against everything. Not loving the brethren and manifesting hatred against them is the sure sign of being in darkness and walking in darkness. Such are the tests of Christian profession; light and love, obedience and loving the brethren; where there is no life from God there is absence of love for the brethren and a walk in darkness and not in the light. It seems that many in John's day were in that deplorable condition, while today such is almost universally the case.

1 John 2:12-17

contain a message to those who are in the light, who possess that life and in whom it is manifested in obedience and in love. He addresses the fathers and the young men. Before he does this he mentions that which all believers, even the most feeble, possess. "I write unto you little children (the term of endearment which means the whole family of God) because your sins are forgiven you for His name's sake." This is blessedly true of every child of God, Each has

“redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins.” It is the thing which is settled for time and eternity for all those who are in Christ.

Then different grades are mentioned: fathers, young men and little children. The meaning is in the spiritual sense, fathers in Christ, young men in Christ and babes in Christ. The word “children” used in 1 John 2:13 and 1 John 2:18 is a different word from the one used in 1 John 2:12. In this chapter in 1 John 2:1; 1 John 2:12 and 1 John 2:28 the little children are all the family of God, but in 1 John 2:13 and 1 John 2:15 it means young converts.

The maturity of the fathers consists in knowing Him that was from the beginning, that is, the Lord Jesus Christ. Spiritual progress and maturity is a deep knowledge and appreciation of Christ. The Apostle Paul illustrates what real Christian maturity is. He had but one desire to know Him; not I but Christ; Christ is all. The Fathers have Christ for their fullest portion and walking in Him have learned the depths of His grace and the glory of His person. They are occupied not with their experience but with Himself. It has been well said, “All true experience ends with forgetting self and thinking of Christ.” To know Him, to know Him still better, to be entirely dependent on Him, to have none other but Him, never losing sight of Him-- that is the highest attainment of a Christian.

He speaks next of the young men, who have advanced in their Christian life. They had gone forward in undaunted faith and courage and overcame the difficulties; they overcame by faith the wicked one. The strength of the new life, that is, Christ, was manifested in them in conflict. The “babes,” comes next, the young converts, who have not much experience in conflict. To them he writes, “Ye have known the Father.” Every newborn babe in Christ cries, enabled by the Spirit of adoption, “Abba, Father.” To know God as Father is the blessed birthright of every newborn soul.

Once more he writes the same to the fathers. He can add nothing to it for the highest attainment is to know Him, as the fathers know Him. But he has more to say to the young men. He tells them that they are strong, because the Word of God was abiding in them, which is the source of power and strength of every believer and because the Word of God abided in them they overcame the wicked one. Then follows the exhortation and warning not to love the world, the world of which John speaks later, which lieth in the wicked one.”

This world-system in every aspect, whether we call it the social world, the political world, the commercial world, the scientific world, the religious world-- all is not of the Father. All its glory is not of the Father. The love of the world is, therefore, inconsistent with the love of the Father. The controlling principles in it are the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life. May we

remember once more that our Lord speaks concerning His own, “They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.” Grace has taken us out of this old world, with its corruption which is there by lust and has put us into another world, so to speak, in which Christ is the center and the attraction. That new sphere is our place. The only way to escape this world with its beguiling influences is by separation from it. And that separation becomes real when we know Him, as the fathers know him, and find our joy and our satisfaction in Christ. “And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof, but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever.” But if this exhortation was needed in John’s day, how much more is it needed in our days, when, as never before, the god of this age blinds the eyes of them that believe not, when this world system, in its godless and seductive character, develops a power and attraction unknown before, and when on all sides professing Christians are “lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God.”

Chapter 2

III. TRUTH AND ERROR

2:18-27 – Loyalty to the faith and fellowship

Verses 18-21. Doctrinal defection, the foe of fellowship

Verses 22-23. The essence of doctrinal defection

2:24-29. Abiding in Christ and fellowship

Verses 24-26. Adherence to the truth

This section contains a warning which is addressed to the babes, the little children, young believers. Truth and error, are contrasted. Seducers were trying to lead them astray, for we read in 1 John 2:26 : “These things have I written unto you concerning them that seduce you.” He reminds them that it is “the last time,” a striking expression, for since it was written centuries have come and gone, and what was true then is true now, that it is the last time; only the Lord is still patiently waiting, not willing that any should perish. Christ was manifested, the truth revealed in Him and the world rejected Him and His truth. Satan became the god of this age, with the mystery of iniquity working in it from the very beginning. Anti-christianity is not a new thing of our times; it was here from the very beginning. John writes, “Even now there are many antichrists, whereby we know it is the last time.” And the last time has its “last days” which are now upon us.

Anti-Christianity is increasing on all sides till the Antichrist, the man of sin, will be revealed (2 Thessalonians 2:1-17). An antichrist is not a vicious lawbreaker, an out and out immoral man. An antichrist is one who rejects Christ, who does not allow His claims; who denies that Jesus is the Son of God. It is of great significance that John speaks of the antichrists in his day as having gone out from among the professing body of Christians (1 John 2:19). They were not true believers but only professed belief, they had left the flock and gone into apostasy, "that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us."

In 1 John 2:22-23 we have a picture of the antichrists of John's day and a prophecy of anti-christianity down to the end of the age when the great opposer will appear in a person, the personal antichrist. "Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist that denieth the Father and the Son. Whosoever denieth the Son hath not the Father. He who confesseth the Son hath the Father also." Anti-christianity is the denial that Jesus is the Christ. It includes every denial of the person of the Lord Jesus, the denial that He is the Son of God come into the flesh, His virgin birth and that He was sent by the Father. Such denials were prominent in John's lifetime. Gnosticism was troubling the Church. They denied the Messiahship, and deity of the Lord Jesus Christ. Other systems were present in embryo, known later by the name of Arianism, etc. Denying the Son they denied the Father also.

These are important statements for our own days, the last days of the present age. What began in the days when the Holy Spirit penned this Epistle is now full-grown in the world. It is all about us in various forms throughout the professing church, only with this difference, the apostates in the beginning were more honest than the apostates in our times. They were in the professing church and when they began their denials they went out, separated themselves from the true Church.

The apostates of today remain in the professing church and maintain outwardly a Christian profession, so that it becomes the solemn duty of true believers to separate themselves from these enemies of the cross of Christ. They deny both the Jewish hope, which centers in the promises of the Messiah, and the Christian hope, which is the Father and the Son. They reject the truths of the Old and the New Testament. They speak of the God of Abraham, who promised the seed to come from Abraham, as a tribal god. They make common cause with the Jewish apostates in denying that there are predictions concerning the Messiah in the Old Testament.

We give but one illustration of this fact. Jews deny that the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah is a Messianic prophecy; the servant of Jehovah is explained to mean the nation Israel and not the Christ of God. This infidel view is held today by many

preachers and teachers in various evangelical denominations, in spite of the fact that the New Testament tells us that it is Christ of whom Isaiah spoke. Rejecting Isaiah 7:14, the prophecy concerning the virgin birth, they reject the virgin birth itself, and brazenly utter the greatest blasphemy which human lips can utter, that Christ was born like any other man. They speak of Him as a great leader and teacher, as having divinity in Himself, in a degree higher than found in the rest of the race. His absolute deity is not believed; that He is the propitiation for sins is sneered at, that He will ever appear again in His glorified humanity in a second visible and glorious manifestation is ridiculed.

Thus anti-christianity is present with us in the camp of Christendom in such a marked and universal way as unknown before. With denying Christ they deny the Father. All that we have seen in this Epistle concerning Him, the true God and the eternal life, fellowship with the Father and with His Son, walking in the light, the advocacy of Christ and loving the brethren, is denied by them. They speak of “love”; they speak of toleration and the “Christ- spirit.” But those who are the brethren, who contend for the faith once and for all delivered unto the saints, who believe on the Son of God, in His sacrificial work on the cross, are denounced by them, belittled and branded as fanatics. And the end is not yet. Let them continue in their evil ways under the guidance of the lying spirit of darkness and they may yet stoop to actual persecution of those who constitute the body of Christ. The conditions in Christendom today are the most solemn the true Church of Jesus Christ has faced. The heading up in “the Antichrist” cannot be far distant. As John writes these Christ-deniers, these blasphemers, who make the Holy Son of God the offspring of--we dare not finish the sentence! --may speak of “the Father,” but they have not the Father, because only those who confess the Son of God, Christ come in the flesh, have the Father.

John writes all this to the babes, young believers, warning them against the lie. He useth the word “liar,” for such the apostates are. In using this word repeatedly, he reveals his character as “Boanerges”--the son of thunder. Then he tells these babes how they may be guarded and kept. He reminds them that they have the anointing of the Holy One, that is, the Holy Spirit dwelling in their hearts and with Him they have the capacity to know and judge all these things. If they follow His guidance in and through the Word they would be kept in the truth and guarded from accepting the lie.

Let us again remember it is not the fathers, or the young men John addresses, but the babes. Here is a strong argument against the teaching so widespread among true believers, that the Holy Spirit is not given to a believer in regeneration, but that the gift of the Spirit must be sought in a definite experience after conversion. This is a serious error which opens the door to the

most subtle delusions as found in certain Holiness sects and Pentecostalism. 1 John 2:24 gives another instruction and exhortation. It is the truth concerning Christ, which they had heard from the beginning, which abiding in them will keep them. And besides “the anointing which ye have received of Him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you, but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in Him.” The teachers in this instance who tried to seduce them (1 John 2:26) were not gifts of Christ to His body, but false teachers, who came with a lying message. They did not need these teachers; the Holy Spirit was their teacher and infallible guide, but never apart from the written Word. All false teaching they were to repulse and fall back upon Him who guides in all truth. They were safe against all error as they abided in that.



1 John was probably written from Ephesus; this is the Library of Celsus, Ephesus

IV. RIGHTEOUSNESS AND LOVE AS MANIFESTED BY THE CHILDREN OF GOD CHAPTERS 2:28-3:18

1. The children of God and their coming manifestation (1 John 2:28 -1 John 3:3)

2. Sin and the new nature (1 John 3:4-9)

3. Righteousness and love (1 John 3:10-18)

Verses 27-29. Reliance upon the Holy Spirit

3:1-10. Righteous living and fellowship

Verse 1. God's bestowed love, an incentive to a holy life

Verses 2-3. Christ's coming, an incentive to a holy life

1 John 2:28 -1 John 3:3.

The address to the babes in Christ ended with the 27th verse, and now once more he speaks of the teknia, the little children, by which all believers are meant. The exhortation has been much misunderstood. It does not mean that by abiding in Him the believer may have confidence at His appearing. John speaks of himself and other servants of Christ, who minister the gospel and the truth of God. He urges the little children to abide in Him, "that when He shall appear we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming." He wants them to walk carefully, to be faithful in all things, so that John and the other servants may not be left ashamed in that coming day. It is the same truth which Paul mentions in 1 Thessalonians 2:19-20.

1 John 2:29 mentions the test of righteousness. It is an acid test. "If ye know that He is righteous, ye know that every one that doeth righteousness is born of Him." But the purpose of it is not to question the reality of their salvation as born again, to make them doubt, but the test is given so that they might be enabled to reject a spurious profession. Before he proceeds with the truth expressed in this verse, he mentions the fact that as born of God they are the children of God and what they shall be.

In 1 John 3:1-2 the word "sons of God" must be changed to "children of God." "John never speaks of "sons of God" in his message. It is in the writings of Paul the Holy Spirit speaks of believers as "sons and heirs." But John unfolds the truth that believers are in the family of God by the new birth, hence the use of the word "children" to denote the community of nature as born of God. As children of God we are partakers of the divine nature. It is the love of the Father which has bestowed this upon all who believe. And most emphatically the Spirit of God assures us through the pen of John, "Now we are the children of God." There can be no doubt about it, it is our present and known position, because having believed on Him we are born again and are in possession of eternal life.

That which we shall be has not yet been manifested, but while it is not yet manifested we, nevertheless, know what we shall be. But how do we know? We know it because the Holy Spirit has revealed it in the Word of God. "But we know that when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is." This is our blessed assurance! To this God has called us; it is "the hope of His calling" (Ephesians 1:18). It is that to which we are predestined, to see Him as He is and then infinitely more than that "to be like Him." We see Him now by faith in His Word and are changed into the same image from glory to glory; when we shall see Him in that soon coming day, when He comes for His saints, we shall see Him bodily and then our bodies will be fashioned like unto His glorious body. Of all this the world knows nothing. It knew Him not, knew not His life, nor His glory; it does not know the life which is in the children of God and what glory awaits them. And this hope is a purifying hope. We see that John speaks of the blessed hope as Peter and James, addressing Jewish believers, do not.

Verses 4-5. A holy life, the intent of salvation

Verses 6-10. A holy life and fellowship

1 John 3:4-9.

He makes a contrast between sin and the new nature and shows the marks of one who abides in Christ and one who hath not seen Him neither knows Him. "Every one that practiseth sin, practiseth lawlessness; for sin is lawlessness, this is the correct rendering. The definition of sin as "transgression of the law" is misleading and incorrect. Before there ever was a law, sin was in the world (Romans 5:12, etc.); how then can sin be the transgression of the law? It is not sins of which John speaks, but sin, the evil nature of man. Here the apostle regards man as doing nothing else but his own, natural will; he lives as a natural man. He acts independently of God, and, as far as he is concerned, never does anything but his own will. John is, therefore, not speaking of positive overt acts, but of the natural man's habitual bent and character, his life and nature.

The sinner, then, sins, and in this merely shows in it his state and the moral root of his nature as a sinner, which is lawlessness. But the born one, the child of God, is in a different position. He knows that Christ was manifested to take away our sins and that in Him there was no sin. If one knows Him and abideth in Him, that one sinneth not. If the believer sins it is because he has lost sight of Christ and does not act in the new life imparted unto him. Another object usurps the place of Christ, and then acting in self-will he is readily exposed to the wiles of the devil using his old nature and the world to lead him astray. If a man lives habitually in sin, according to his old nature, he hath not seen Him nor known

Him. A child of God may sin but he is no longer living in sin; if a professing believer lives constantly in sin it is the evidence that he has not known Him at all. There were such who tried to deceive them. Their teaching was evidently a denial of holiness, that there was no need of righteousness. But the demand is for righteousness, while those who practice sin, live habitually in it, are of the devil. No true believer lives thus, for he knows the One whose life he possesses was manifested that He might destroy the works of the devil.

“Whosoever is begotten of God doth not practise sin, because his seed abideth in him, and he cannot sin, because he is begotten of God.” This verse has puzzled many Christians, but it is quite simple. Every creature lives according to its nature. The fish has the nature of a fish and lives its nature in the water; a bird has its own nature and lives it in the air, and not under the water as the fish. Our Lord said to Nicodemus, “That which is born of the flesh is flesh.” Man has a fallen nature, the nature of sin, and that nature can do nothing but sin. That is why He said, “Ye must be born again.” In the new birth the divine nature is imparted. This nature is He Himself, Christ, the eternal life. Christ could not sin for He is God, and God cannot sin. The new nature believers possess cannot sin, for it is His nature. But why do new-born ones sin? Because the Christian has two natures, the old nature and the new nature. The old nature is not eradicated; a believer when he sins does so because he has given way to that old nature, has acted in the flesh. But the new nature followed will never lead to sin, for it is a holy nature, and for that nature it is impossible to sin. Some have suggested out of ignorance that the translation ought to be instead of cannot sin “ought not to sin,” or “should not sin.” The Greek text does not permit such a translation, anything different from “cannot sin” is an unscriptural paraphrase.

3:11-18. Brotherly love and fellowship

Verses 11-15. The fellowship of love

Verses 16-18. The manifestation of love

1 John 3:10-18.

The test as to the children of God and the children of the devil follows in this section. Whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother. The message from the beginning, that is the same beginning as in 1 John 1:1 --is that we should love one another. This was the commandment given by the Lord, “This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you” (John 15:12). There is natural affection in the world, even in the animal creation. The natural man also can make himself amiable and speak of love and toleration. In fact an amiable character, a loving disposition through

self-improvement is urged and practised among the antichristian cults, such as New Thought, Christian Science and the Liberalists, the advocates of the new theology.

But the love of which John speaks is exclusively of God and unknown to the natural heart of man. Yet all these antichrists go to the Epistle of John and quote him to confirm their evil doctrine of “the brotherhood of man and the universal fatherhood of God.” John does not speak of loving man as such, but loving the brethren, the other born ones in the family of God, and that is a divine love. It is the great test of the divine nature, “We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren.” The world not only knows nothing of that divine love, but the world hates those who are born of God. “Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you.” This fact is illustrated by Cain. He was of the devil. He slew his brother because Cain’s works were evil, he was an unbeliever, and his brother’s were righteous, Abel believed and that was counted to him for righteousness. And so the world hates the brethren, the children of God on the same ground and for the same reason. Then again he tests profession: “He who loveth not his brother abideth in death. Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer.” Hating the brother is the evidence that the professing Christian is in the state of death and linked with the murderer from the beginning.

The better rendering of 1 John 3:16 is, “Hereby we know love, because He laid down His life for us.” Such love must be manifested in practical ways towards the brethren.

“But ‘we know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren.’ Not because we love certain of the brethren, let us remember. We may love even the children of God for some other reason than as His children. We may love them, perhaps in gratitude to them for services that we may be receiving from them. Further than this, we may mistake for brotherly love that which is merely self-love in a subtler form. Men minister to our comfort, please us, and we think we love them; and in the true child of God there may be yet, after all, as to much that he counts love to the brethren, a similar mistake. A love to the children of God, as such, must find its objects wherever these children are, however little may be, so to speak, our gain from them; however, little they may fit to our tastes. The true love of the children of God must be far other than sociality, and cannot be sectarian. It is, as the Apostle says, ‘without partiality, and without hypocrisy.’ This does not, of course, deny that there may be differences that still obtain. He in whom God is most seen should naturally attract the heart of one who knows God according to the apostle’s reasoning here. It is God seen in men whom we recognize in the love borne to them; but,

then, God is in all His own, as the apostle is everywhere arguing; and, therefore, there is nothing self contradictory in what has been just said.” -- F.W. Grant.

Chapters 3-5a

V. HEREBY WE KNOW

CHAPTERS 3:19-5:13

- 1. Hereby we know that we are of the truth (1 John 3:19-24)*
- 2. Hereby know ye the Spirit of God (1 John 4:1-4)*
- 3. Hereby know we the Spirit of truth and of error (1 John 4:5-6)*
- 4. The Love manifested toward us (1 John 4:7-19)*
- 5. The final tests as to the possession of eternal life (1 John 4:20-21; 1 John 5:1-13)*

1 John 3:19-24 Christian assurance and fellowship

Verses 19-21. The nature of assurance

Verses 22-24. The realization of fellowship

If the love of God dwells in the heart of the child of God it must be manifested in a practical way. Love must be expressed in deed and in truth, which is the fruit of true faith. If the believer does this he knows that he is of the truth. If it is lacking he is but an empty professing believer. But if we know that we are of the truth, by bearing such fruit of faith, we can assure our hearts before Him, and we can draw nigh with confidence. As our hearts do not condemn us, knowing that we are of the truth, we have confidence toward God and whatsoever we ask, we receive of Him, because we keep His commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in His sight. Where there is not a good conscience and the Holy Spirit is grieved real nearness to God and the effectual prayer which availeth much are impossible. It is the same blessed truth our Lord spoke in connection with the parable of the vine. “If ye abide in Me, and My words abide in you ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you (John 15:7).

But what is His commandment? Strange that some expositors have read into it the Ten Commandments. The context answers the question: “And this is His commandment, that we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as He gave us commandment. And He that keepeth His

commandment dwelleth in Him, and He in him. And hereby we know that He abideth in us, by the Spirit He hath given to us.”



Carved head of Medusa, and evil figure in Greek mythology

4:1-6. Discernment of error and fellowship

Verse 1. The presence of error

Verses 2-6. The acid test of error

1 John 4:1-4.

The last sentence of the preceding chapter gives the assurance that the believer has the Holy Spirit. There is no such thing as a true child of God without the Holy Spirit. The indwelling Spirit is the proof that He Himself dwells in us. But how do we know that it is the Spirit of God? How can a test be made? The sphere of the Spirit is the territory in which the spirit of error and darkness operates and where the liar from the beginning counterfeits. Many false prophets inspired by the spirit of darkness had gone out into the world and the apostle gives a warning not to believe every spirit but to try the spirits. The true test is the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God.

But this means more than a mere confession with the lips, it means to own the person and lordship of Jesus Christ our Saviour. The demons know how to confess Him and yet they are demons (Matthew 8:29). The spirit of antichrist denies Him, does not confess that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This spirit which is not the Spirit of God manifests itself in the most subtle forms. It is called “true Christian charity” in our days to make common cause in what is called “social service” with those who do not confess Christ, who do not own Him as Saviour and Lord. These many antichrists speak of Him as man, they go so far as to call Christ a manifestation of God in human form, but they deny that He is very God come in the flesh.

As stated before the most prominent form of it is today the denial of His virgin birth. Anything which denies the full glory of the Lord Jesus Christ which in any way detracts from His glory, is the spirit of antichrist. About a hundred years ago a movement was in existence which claimed to be another Pentecost, just as there are movements today which claim the same unscriptural thing. The leader of that movement, Edward Irving, put great stress upon the incarnation, that Jesus came in the flesh. But after a while the demons which stood behind the movement brought forth the horrible doctrine of the peccability of Christ, that He had a corrupt nature like any other man. Such is the subtlety of Satan, the old serpent. He always strikes at Christ and His glory.

“The false prophets are certainly no fewer in number at the present time than when the apostle spoke; yet, in general, we may say they assume less divine authority. We have sunk down so far into the wisdom of the world that man is credited with a place which God has lost. Inspiration is the inspiration of genius, rather than of God. We are more and more getting to lose the reality of the last, just as we are coming more and more to believe in the former. We believe in brilliancy, in eloquence, in intellect, in whatever you please in this way, but the assumption of speaking in any direct way by the Spirit of God no more exists, for the mass, except as one may say that the Spirit of God is as liberal as men are, and speaks in very diverse fashion--in poets, philosophers, and all the acknowledged leaders among men” (Numerical Bible).

1 John 4:5-6.

The fifth verse has a good description of these antichrists and their following. These men, with their boasted learning and scholarship, their great swelling words, called eloquence, their natural amiability and cultured, courteous manners are of the world. They were never born again. If they had ever seen themselves lost and undone, and found in Christ their peace with God, they would yield complete obedience to Him and not deny His glory. When they speak they speak of the world. They speak of world conditions, and how they

may be improved, of a better human society. Quite true they are even religious, but what they speak is not that which is of the Spirit, but what concerns the world system. The crowds want to hear that for it pleases the flesh, and thus the devil brings his audience to hear them. Such antichrists in cap and gown have multiplied by the thousands; they are found in the leading pulpits of all denominations.

The test as to the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error is stated in these words: “We are of God; He that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth us not. Hereby know we the Spirit of truth and of error.” The test is the apostle’s doctrine. The Epistles are the full revelation of the doctrine of Christ, they contain the “many things” which the Lord spoke of when on earth, and which should be revealed when the Holy Spirit came. He has come and has made known the blessed things which eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, the things which God has prepared for them that love Him, but which are now revealed by His Spirit, the Spirit of truth (1 Corinthians 2:9-10). The spirit of error denies these doctrines. In our day the enemy has invested a most subtle slogan, “Back to Christ.” It sounds well but behind it stands the father of lies. These men who speak of going back to Christ charge our beloved brother Paul with having a theological system of his own, which they claim Christ, on earth, never taught. They reject the great redemption truths made known by the Lord through the apostle to the Gentiles. Their cry “Back to Christ” is the spirit of antichrist.

4:7-18. Love and the manifestation of fellowship

Verses 7-8. Love, a family characteristic

Verses 9-10. The supreme manifestation of love

Verses 11-12. The obligation of love

Verses 13-16. Love and the indwelling presence of God

Verses 17-18. The perfection of love in us

1 John 4:7-19.

These blessed words are addressed to the beloved, true believers. The great center of this passage is “God is Love.” Love is of God. But how do we know that God is Love? Such an antichristian system as “Christian Science” babbles about the love of God, but that which alone expresses the love of God, and by which it is known that God is love, they reject completely. The question, how do we know that God is love is answered in 1 John 4:9-10. “In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent His only begotten Son into the

world, that we might live through Him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.” Apart from this there is no knowledge of the love of God. He who is born again knows that love, for in believing it (John 3:16) he receives eternal life, and that love was perfect in Him when we had no love for Him--not that we loved God, but that He loved us. In His great love He has met every need.

This love, the nature of God, is in those who are born again, Every one that loveth is born of God and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God. “Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought to love one another. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and His love is perfected in us.” Love therefore is the very essence of the new nature and must be manifested towards all who are the objects of the love of God and are in the family of God by having believed that love.

“His presence, Himself, dwelling in us rises in the excellency of His nature above all the barriers of circumstances, and attaches us to those who are His. It is God in the power of His nature which is the source of thought and feeling and diffuses itself among them in whom it is. One can understand this. How is it that I love strangers from another land, persons of different habits, whom I have never known, more intimately than members of my own family after the flesh? How is it that I have thoughts in common, objects infinitely loved in common, affections powerfully engaged, a stronger bond with persons whom I have never seen, than with the otherwise dear companions of my childhood? It is because there is in them and in me a source of thoughts and affections which is not human. God is in it. God dwells in us, What happiness! What a bond! Does He not communicate Himself to the soul? Does He not render it conscious of His presence in love? Assuredly, yes. And if He is thus in us, the blessed source of our thoughts, can there be fear, or distance, or uncertainty, with regarding to what He is? None at all. His love is perfect in us” (John N. Darby).

His love is perfected in us by loving one another. Once more he uses the phrase “Hereby we know.” “Hereby we know that we dwell in Him, and He in us, because He hath given us of His Spirit.” “The Love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the indwelling Spirit.” He proceeds: “We have seen and testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world.” Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the son of God, God dwelleth in Him and he in God.” What wonderful words these are! Can there be anything greater and more wonderful than dwelling in God and God dwelling in us! And this is true of every believer. If we confess that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, if we rest in His finished work as well, knowing the Father sent Him to be the Saviour, and our Saviour

therefore, then the Holy Spirit dwells in us and as a result God dwelleth in us and we in God. There can be no question about it for God says so.

The enjoyment of it is a different matter. If it is not real to us and if we do not enjoy it there is something which hinders it in ourselves. If a great king should pay us a visit in our home and dwell there and we do not recognize the fact of the honor and privilege bestowed upon us, and if we do not trouble about it and show our appreciation of it, we would have no enjoyment in such a visit. To have the reality of it and enjoy the wonderful truth that God dwells in us and we in Him we must practise what our Lord said in John 14:23, "If a man love Me he will keep My words, and My Father will love him, and We will come unto him, and make Our abode in Him." We must dwell in love, the very nature of God, and that love is manifested towards Him and towards the brethren. 1 John 4:12 and 1 John 4:16 make this clear. "And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God and God in him."

Another important fact is stated in the verses which follow: "Herein hath love been perfected with us, that we have boldness in the day of judgment, because as He is, even so are we in this world. There is no fear in love but perfect love casteth out fear, because fear has torment; and he that feareth is not perfected in love." It has nothing to do with our love, as some take it nor with seeking an experience of being "perfect in love." It is His love which casteth out fear, believing that love and dwelling in it. If we believe and know what God has made us in His infinite grace what Christ is, that as He is so are we, how can we fear anything! The coming day of judgment we await not only without any fear, but with boldness, for the day will only bring the full display of what Christ is and what we are in Him and with Him. The knowledge of His perfect love, the love which has reached down to us and lifted us so high, casteth out all fear.

("It is a blessed love that Christ came into the world for such sinners as we are. But then there is the day of judgment. When I think of the love, I am all happy; but when I think of the day of judgment, my conscience is not quite easy. Though the heart may have tasted the love, the conscience not being quite clear, when I think of judgment I am not quite happy. This is what is provided for here. 'As He is so are we in this world.' The love was shown in visiting us when we were sinners; it is enjoyed in communion: but it is completed in this, that I am in Christ, and that Christ must condemn Himself in the day of judgment, if He condemns me, because He is, so am I in the world, I am glorified before I get there. He changes this vile body and makes it like to His glorious body. When I am before the judgment seat, I am in this changed and glorified body; I am like my judge" Synopsis of the Bible.)

4:19-21. The incentive to love and fellowship

Verse 19. The incentive to love

Verses 20-21. The fellowship of love

5:1-5. Faith and fellowship

Verses 1-3. Faith introduces us to fellowship

Verses 4-5. Faith gives victory

5:6-12. Testimony and fellowship

Verses 6-10. The testimony concerning the son

Verses 11-12. God's testimony believed

1 John 4:20-21; 1 John 5:1-13.

Once more brotherly love is applied as the test. "If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar." God is in the believer, he is the object of God's love, if therefore the brother is not loved, but hated, it is an evidence that God does not dwell in such a heart and again the beloved disciple brands such an one as a liar.

"Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God and every one that loveth Him that begat, loveth him also that is begotten of Him." This is very logical. Then he gives a counter test to show that it is genuine. "By this we know, that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments." If we love God and keep His commandments, we can rest assured that we love the children of God also. If the soul goes out to Him in love, and it is shown by unreserved fidelity to His will, then love for those begotten of Him, the other members of the family of God, will be the result. "For this is the love of God that we keep His commandments, and His commandments are not grievous." It is a different thing from the law which is called elsewhere a yoke which no one was able to bear (Acts 15:10). Keeping His commandments means to be obedient to His Word, being subject unto Him in all things, for love to God is the spirit of obedience. But the children of God are in the world, though no longer of it. There are hindrances all about in the world which knew Him not and which know not the children of God. All in this world is opposition to God and hinders true obedience. But that which is born of God overcometh the world. Our faith is the victory which overcometh the world. What faith is it? It is the faith which is occupied with the Son of God, which

yields obedience to Him, does His will. Such a faith is the victory that overcomes the world and its attractions. This is stated in 1 John 5:5.

“And He, the Son of God, even Jesus Christ, came by water and blood-not by water only, but by water and blood.” “And it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is truth” (1 John 5:6). How beautiful is this passage and what divine perfection it reveals! Only John in his Gospel gives the account of the opened side of our adorable Saviour and that water and blood came forth out of the pierced side. “And he that saw it (John) bare record and his record is true and he knoweth that he saith true that ye might believe” (John 19:35). What the sinner needs is cleansing, a cleansing morally and a cleansing from guilt. The water is for cleansing, the blood telling of expiation cleanses from guilt. To make here of the water, baptism, and of the blood, the Lord’s Supper, is as false as it is ridiculous. It is purification and propitiation as accomplished and provided for in the death of Christ for the believer. As a result the Holy Spirit is here on earth. Note the Apostle John does not put forward his own testimony here as given in the above passage, but the Holy Spirit Himself beareth witness to it. He is on earth for this purpose to bear witness to Christ and the work of Christ. How awful the rejection of that witness appears in the light of these words--that rejection which is so widespread and pronounced in antichristian modernism!

The seventh verse (1 John 5:17) has no business in our Bibles. It must be stricken out. It is an interpolation and all the historical evidences are against it. The oldest manuscripts do not contain these words which we read in 1 John 5:7. Leaving out this inserted verse we notice the connection which exists between 1 John 5:6 and 1 John 5:8. “And there are three that bear witness on earth, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood; and these three are one.” The Spirit is the abiding witness of accomplished redemption, and He dwells in the believer.

1 John 5:9-13 need no further detailed annotations. They are so plain and simple that only one wilfully blind can misunderstand them. God’s witness is concerning His Son. The believer who believes on the Son of God hath the witness in himself, that is, by the indwelling Spirit, and by the salvation he possesses, the new nature, the eternal life. Any man who does not believe God’s witness concerning His Son hath made Him a liar. Think of it, dear reader, the creature of the dust makes God, who cannot lie, a liar! This is the heinous sin of the great religious world. The record we have is, that God hath given to us eternal life, that this life is in His Son, that if we have the Son we have life, if we have not the Son we have not life. 1 John 5:13 concludes the argument and teaching of the Epistle concerning eternal life.

Chapter 5b

VI. CONCLUSION

CHAPTER 5:14-21

5: 13-15. Prayer and fellowship

Verse 13. The importance of assurance

Verses 14-15. Power in prayer

5: 16-21. Prayer fellowship and the sinning Christian

Verses 16-17. Prayer and the problem of serious sin

Verses 18-20. Sin and its remedy

Verse 21. Concluding charge

The conclusion of this great Epistle mentions first the practical confidence which a believer may have, the outcome of that relationship and fellowship with the Father and His Son, which the doctrinal part so blessedly unfolds. We can come in prayer to Him with boldness and whatever we ask “according to His will He heareth us; and if we know that He heareth us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions which we have asked of Him.” As a loving Father He listens to the cry of His children and He answers if it is according to His will, and the child of God would not have it differently, and desire anything to be granted him which is contrary to the will of God. Our unanswered prayers we joyfully recognize as being not according to His will. It is not true faith when fanatics, like faith curists, say that God must do certain things. That is not faith but presumption.

But what is the sin unto death (1 John 5:16)? God chastises the sinning believer often through sickness. And the chastisement may lead to the physical death of the child of God. Such was the case in Corinth (1 Corinthians 11:31). It is the same case as James 5:14-15. If the sin is not unto physical death as a chastisement, we can pray for the brother and he will be restored. But there is a sin unto death. Ananias and Sapphira committed such a sin. No prayer in such a case does avail anything. God in His governmental dealings takes the offender away as to his life on earth. It does not affect the salvation of the soul, as those teach who think that one who has believed, has eternal life, and is a member of the family of God, can be lost again.

The conclusion of the Epistle consists in three statements that “we know”: “We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not; but He that is begotten of God keepeth himself and that wicked one toucheth him not.” Sin is the touch of the wicked one. If the believer guards himself, by living in the fellowship with the Father and the Son, walking in the Light, the wicked one cannot reach him; he lives according to his new nature and sinneth not. “We know that we are of God and the whole world lieth in the wicked one.” Hence God’s children should be separated from the world. If a believer is not he moves on the very territory of the wicked one and the author of sin finds occasion to touch him and lead him to sin. “We know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know Him that is true, and we are in Him that is true, even in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life.”

The final exhortation is “Little children (teknia--all God’s children), keep yourselves from idols. Amen.” What is an idol? Anything and everything that draws the affection and devotion of heart and soul from the Lord Jesus Christ. May He, through the power of His Spirit, keep us all from idols. And we shall be kept if we give in our hearts and lives the pre-eminence to our Lord and walk in the light as He is in the light.





The Asclepium at Pergamum

Second Letter of John

2 John – Introduction

We treat these small documents [2nd and 3rd Epistles of John] together. No intelligent person can doubt that both Epistles were written by the same person. We do not need to investigate the objections and inventions of rationalists like Bretschneider, those of the so-called Tuebingen school and the modern critics, who deny the Johannine authorship and teach that the fictitious “John the Presbyter of Ephesus “ wrote these two letters.

But all these modern conceptions are answered by the ancient authorities which ascribe both Epistles to the writer of the First Epistle, that is, the Apostle John. Irenaeus, who as a boy had listened to Polycarp, who knew John personally, bears witness to the genuineness of the Second Epistle, so does Clement of Alexandria, the Muratorian fragment, Dionysius of Alexandria, and others. Both Epistles seem to have been accepted from the very beginning as the inspired testimony of John.

The internal evidence is conclusive. Both Epistles are in tone, style and vocabulary like the Gospel of John and the First Epistle of John. The great characteristic words of the other writings of John (the Gospel and John 1:1-51) “Love,” “truth,” “world,” etc., are found in these two Epistles. They are, indeed, complementary to the First Epistle and give some of the truths contained in the

First Epistle in a practical way. The warning contained in the Second Epistle concerning receiving one who does not bring the doctrine of Christ, that is, an antichrist, connects closely with the instructions of 1 John 4:1-21. There is no question but both Epistles are appendices to the First Epistle.

Commentary – Only chapter

Verses 1-6. Living in truth and love

Verses 1-3. The salutation

Verses 4-6. The exhortation

Verses 7-13. Refusing the false fellowship of error

Verses 7-9. The presence of error indicated

Verses 10-11. Refusal to admit false teachers

Verses 12-13. Conclusion

The Second Epistle is addressed by the elder unto the elect lady and her children. The word elder has the same meaning as it has in 1 Peter 5:1-14. Some take it that the elect lady means an assembly, and her children the members of the assembly. But this is a very strained application.

The word “Kyria” (lady) excludes this meaning, besides other reasons which we do not follow here. She was a Christian woman of note generally known and beloved, having children, whom the apostle had found walking in the truth. She had also a sister with children, who seems to have been in the same place where the apostle was, probably in Ephesus. This is indicated by the last verse of the Epistle, “The children of thy elect sister greet thee.” The keynote of this message to the elect lady, unknown by name, is the word “truth.” The apostle lets them know that he loves them, as well as all other believers in the truth. That is the ground of real love; every child of God--man, woman or child--is best beloved for the sake of the truth, the blessed truth so abundantly poured forth in the First Epistle, the truth which is Christ Himself And that truth “dwelleth in us, and shall be with us forever.” Thus the truth Known binds together in closest fellowship all who know Him.

Then follows a blessed greeting, “Grace, mercy and peace shall be with you, from the Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and love.” The statement, “the Son of the Father” is unique; it is not found elsewhere in the New Testament and is in full keeping with the object of this

little Epistle, for the denial of Christ coming in the flesh, and the warning against these deceivers, is the chief message of the Epistle. The great joy of the Apostle was that he found them walking in the truth, that the children of the elect lady walked according to the commandment received from the Father (1 John 3:24). Having the truth necessitates walking in the truth. One who claims to have the truth and does not walk in it, shows that he does not know the truth in his heart. But walking in the truth is the result of having and knowing the truth.

What we have stated before, that these two Epistles are appendices of the First Epistle, is seen by the fifth verse (1 John 3:23-24). It is the old and new commandment. It was old because it was manifested in Christ Himself; new because it is just as true in us as in Him. Divine love flows from love, and reproduces itself in all who know the truth, that is, who know Christ. And this is love that we walk after His commandments. It means obedience to Him, and what else is obedience but love in exercise?

But why does he write all this? With the seventh verse he gives the reason and it is a very solemn one, indeed. Well may we look to these words in our own days for they have a great meaning for the children of God living in these closing days, as they had a meaning in the beginning of the dispensation. "For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come into the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist." This was true in the beginning of the age, and all through the present age the old serpent has made its many attempts to attack Christ and foster the lies concerning His person and glory, but never before has this been so evident as in our own days. The reason is that the age is about to end. Denying that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh was mentioned by John in his First Epistle (chapter 4). It includes all phases of evil doctrines concerning Christ, the Son of the Father. It is a denial of His essential deity, His true humanity, His Virgin birth, His infallibility, His holy character, His physical resurrection, and His bodily presence in glory.

We need not mention again how many such antichrists are about in these days. And John brands them in plain words as deceivers. No matter what names they have, what scholarship and honors they claim, what beautiful characters they have assumed as natural men, if they deny anything about Christ, they are deceivers. He calls, therefore, to look diligently whether some of this awful leaven is not affecting them. If in any way they were contaminated with it they, John and the fellow teachers, might lose the full reward. (See 1 John 2:28). Then follow the instructions in 2 John 1:9-11.

"Whosoever transgresseth and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the

Son.” Even the smallest error about the person of Christ is a transgression of the doctrine of Christ and if followed will lead to a complete rejection of the truth, as it has been so often seen in cases of apostates. Such deniers have not God, while he who abideth in the doctrine of Christ hath both the Father and the Son. After this declaration comes a divine command which is just as binding as any other command in the Word of God. “If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not in your house, neither bid him Godspeed; for he that biddeth him Godspeed is partaker of his evil deeds.”

This is strong language and yet not too strong when we remember what is at stake. Any one who brings not the doctrine of Christ, the doctrine as unfolded in the previous Epistle, concerning Christ the Son of God come in the flesh, dying for sinners and all that clusters around it, is an antichrist. Furthermore he makes God a liar and in denying the doctrine of Christ robs God of His glory and man of his salvation. And every man who denies the virgin birth, or teaches the peccability of Christ, or denies His physical resurrection is such a one. He must be shunned. Fellowship with him is an impossibility. He is not to be welcomed to any Christian home, nor is he to be given the common greeting. If met anywhere there is to be no acknowledgement whatever, not even a “Good Morning” or “Good Night.” This is the meaning of the expression “Godspeed.”

But is not this intolerant? Yes, the intolerance of divine love. If such deceivers are welcomed and fellowship is had with them even in the slightest degree, the believer puts his sanction on a denier of Christ. God will hold all responsible who fellowship any man, any set of men, any institution or anything else, which deny His Son and His glory. This is unpalatable to many. Nowadays it is called “Christian charity and broadmindedness” to mingle with Unitarians, critics, and baptized infidels of various descriptions. His honor and glory is in the background. Happy are we if we stand firm and refuse such fellowship practicing this divinely given injunction by the Apostle of love. God will be our rewarder.

“Having many things to write unto you, I would not write with paper and ink, but I trust to come unto you, and speak face to face, that our joy may be full. The children of the elect sister greet thee. Amen.” Thus ends the Second Epistle.

The Third letter of John

3 John – Introduction

We treat these small documents together. No intelligent person can doubt that both Epistles were written by the same person. We do not need to investigate the objections and inventions of rationalists like Bretschneider, those of the so-called Tuebingen school and the modern critics, who deny the Johannine authorship and teach that the fictitious “John the Presbyter of Ephesus “ wrote these two letters.

But all these modern conceptions are answered by the ancient authorities which ascribe both Epistles to the writer of the First Epistle, that is, the Apostle John. Irenaeus, who as a boy had listened to Polycarp, who knew John personally, bears witness to the genuineness of the Second Epistle, so does Clement of Alexandria, the Muratorian fragment, Dionysius of Alexandria, and others. Both Epistles seem to have been accepted from the very beginning as the inspired testimony of John.

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Commentary – Only chapter

Verses 1-8. Gaius’ example of living in truth and love

Verses 1-4. The apostle’s salutation to Gaius

Verses 5-8. Gaius’ life in the truth

Verses 9-11 Example of a contrary life

Verses 9-10. The example

Verse 11. The warning

Verses 12-14. Demetrius’ good example

Verse 12. Demetrius' good report

Verses 13-14. Closing observations

The Third Epistle is addressed by the elder, the aged Apostle John, to a brother by name of Gaius. A Gaius is mentioned in Acts 19:29; Acts 20:4, Romans 16:23 and 1 Corinthians 1:14. It is impossible to say whether this is the same. John calls him well-beloved, whom he loved in the truth. Thus he emphasizes the truth once more as he had done before. He wishes that he might prosper in his body, in health, as even his soul prospered. He had heard from the brethren who testified of the truth in him and that he walked in the truth. He rejoiced in this and declares "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth." And this is not only the aged apostle's joy, but it is the joy of the Lord. How He must rejoice when His beloved children in whom He dwells walk in truth! Gaius had been very gracious and hospitable. Perhaps the brethren who gave such a good report to John were the recipients of Gaius's kindness. They had witnessed before the assembly how faithful he was in entertaining them, helping them on their journey in every way possible. He had done this not only with the brethren in his locality, but with brethren who were strangers, ministering servants of the Lord Jesus Christ, who went forth for His Name's sake, taking nothing of the Gentiles. In going forth in ministering the Word they depended on the Lord.

The evil of today, even among those who preach the truth, of demanding so much money for so much service was unknown in the Church. Nowhere do we read in the New Testament of a salaried" ministry. The evils of going to the world for support of the Lord's work, or using the methods of the world are widespread and detrimental to true faith and a true testimony to the truth. The work of the Lord and the servants of Christ are to be supported only by the Lord's people and not by the unsaved. Such, then, who go forth for His Name's sake, taking nothing from the Gentiles (those who are outside) are to be received and those who receive them, help them on their journey as Gaius did, are fellow helpers to the truth. They are going to share in that coming day in the fruit of their labors. This is the true fellowship in the truth, as Paul expressed it in Galatians, "Let him that is taught in the Word communicate unto him that teaches in all good things" (Galatians 6:6). It is in contrast from what the Second Epistle demanded--withdrawal from those who bring not the doctrine of Christ, a complete separation from them; but here it is identification with those who know the truth and teach the truth.

This is a bright picture presented in Gaius. Alas! there is another side in this Third Epistle. There was one by name of Diotrephes. His name means "Nourished of God." Of him John writes as follows: "I wrote unto the church,

but Diotrophes, who loveth to have the preeminence among them, received us not. Wherefore, if I come, I will remember his deeds which he doeth, prating against us with malicious words; and not content therewith, neither doth he himself receive the brethren, and casteth them out of the church.” We let another speak on this. “We have another evil designated very clearly here. Diotrophes is the scriptural example of the clerical tribe, as contra-distinguished from the ministry of Christ. There is no service, because there is no love. He is the representative of the spirit which opposes the free action of the Holy Spirit, setting itself even against apostolic authority in order to gain or maintain his own individual pre-eminence.

“Self-importance, jealousy of those over us, impatience of others equally called to serve, scorn of the assembly, yet sometimes humoring the least worthy for its own ends--such are the characteristics of clericalism. I do not mean in clergymen only; for there are men of God incomparably better than their position tends to make them; as on the other hand this evil thing is nowhere so offensive as where the truth that is owned, wholly condemns it” (William Kelly). Diotrophes wanted to be the leader of the assembly, a kind of a pope in embryo. He loved the pre-eminence and this self-love and seeking to maintain his position led him to act so outrageously that he excommunicated the brethren and dared to rise up against the apostle himself. What harm such jealousies, self-seeking, self-glorification and ecclesiastical bossism have worked and are working in the body of Christ! and nowhere so much as in circles where the full truth is known and confessed. But why did Diotrophes love to have the preeminence? Because, unlike the apostle and the beloved Gaius, he did not give the Lord Jesus Christ the preeminence in all things; he did not walk in the truth. When the Lord comes, before His judgment-seat, all these things will be brought to light and dealt with by Him.

John does not leave us with the sad picture of Diotrophes. “Beloved, follow not that which is evil, but that which is good. He that doeth good is of God; but he that doeth evil hath not seen God.” It is another one of the tests as we found them in the First Epistle. Doing good is the active service of love. God does not do evil, but He does good, hence if we do good as believers in truth, we are of God. Then he mentions Demetrius. Perhaps he was one of the servants who went about doing good, preaching the truth, and whom Diotrophes would not receive. How blessed that the Holy Spirit through John’s letter endorses and recommends him. “Demetrius hath good report of all, and of the truth itself; yea, and we also bear record, and ye know that our record is true. “ Such is the comfort of all true servants who walk in the truth, that the Lord knoweth. “I have many things to write, but I will not with ink and pen write unto thee. But I trust I shall shortly see thee, and we shall speak face to face. Peace be to thee.

Our friends salute thee. Greet the friends by name.” Both Epistles end, with a coming face to face meeting. Let us remember there is to be some blessed day a “face to face” meeting, when the saints of God will meet together for eternal fellowship, but above all when we shall be face to face with Him. How soon it may be! But while we wait for that meeting may we walk in the light and in the fullest enjoyment of our fellowship with the Father and with His Son, our blessed Lord. To Him be glory and dominion for ever. Amen.



The tall white marble columns of the Asclepium, Pergamum, just north of Smyrna

1, 2, 3 John Questionnaire

1. What is the teaching of the first letter on forgiveness of, and victory over, sin? With verse 5 compare Revelation 2:7, and 21:7.
2. With 1 John 1:6 compare 1 John 2:4 and 3:4, also John 14:17, 16: 13; 17:17. What is the relation between truth in doctrine and practice?
3. With 1 John 4:1-3 compare the teaching concerning ‘anti-Christ’ (anti-christianity) in 2 Thessalonians 2; 1 Timothy 4; 2 Peter 3; Revelation 13. What do you learn from these to illustrate the first of these passages?

4. Study the attitude which should be adopted towards men who deliberately falsify the Doctrine of Christ (2 John 9:10) or are self-seeking (3 John 9). Compare 1 Timothy 6:5; 2 Timothy 2: 16-18; Titus 3:10.

5. What can be learned from these and Paul's Epistles as to the proper exercise of Christian hospitality?

The Letter of Jude

Contending for the faith

Introduction

The Epistle of Jude is the last Epistle preceding the great final book with which the Holy Scriptures conclude, the book of Revelation. We believe the place given to this Epistle is the right one, for as we shall see, it reveals the conditions, religiously and morally, which prevail on earth before the great coming event takes place, of which Revelation has so much to say. Some have called it "the preface to the Revelation."

The Author

We are not left in doubt who the writer is, for he mentions himself in the beginning of it. It is Jude, the servant of Jesus Christ and brother of James. But who is this Jude or Judas? Among the disciples were two by the name of Judas. There was Judas Iscariot, who ended his miserable career, after he had become the instrument of the devil, by hanging. In John 14:22 we read, "Judas saith unto Him, not Iscariot, Lord, how is it that Thou wilt manifest Thyself unto us, and not unto the world?" The Spirit of God makes it plain that Judas Iscariot did not address Jesus by the name Lord, which expresses faith in His deity, but that there was another Judas in the apostolate who speaks here.

When we turn to the names of the twelve in Matthew 10:2-4, we find the name of Judas but once; it is the name of him who betrayed the Lord. The Judas whose words are recorded in the above passage in the Gospel of John, is called in Matthew 10:3 ... Lebbaeus whose surname was Thaddaeus." In Luke 6:16 and Acts 1:13, his name is given as Judas of James; it must be noticed that the words in the authorized version "the brother" are in italics, which means that they are supplied by the translators. It is not so in the first verse of this epistle; here the writer calls himself "brother of James."

But there is still another Judas found in the Gospels. His name is recorded in Matthew 13:55. "Is not this the carpenter's son? is not His mother called Mary? and His brethren, James, and Joses, and Simon, and Judas?" The James, the brother of the Lord mentioned in this passage, is the author of the Epistle of James. (See introduction to the Epistle of James). The question then arises, is the writer of the Epistle before us, the Apostle Judas of James, also called Lebbaeus, surnamed Thaddaeus, or is it Judas, the one who is called one of the Lord's brethren, and therefore the natural brother of James, the writer of the Epistle of James? Some maintain that Jude is the Apostle Judas, while others see in Jude the brother of James, as given in Matthew 13:55. We endorse the latter view. We give the reasons why the writer of this Epistle cannot be the Apostle Judas.

1. He does not speak of himself as an apostle. He designates himself as a servant of Jesus Christ. Whenever an apostle calls himself a servant of Jesus Christ, he adds his apostleship, as we learn from Romans 1:1, Titus 1:1; 2 Peter 1:1. The only exception is the epistle to the Philippians, in which Paul associates with himself in the address Timothy, and then speaks of himself and Timothy as servants of Jesus Christ.

2. If he were the Apostle Judas, the brother of the Apostle James, the sons of Alphaeus, we have to face great difficulties, as Dean Alford states, involving the wholly unjustifiable hypothesis, that those who are called in Scripture the brethren of our Lord were not His brethren, but His cousins, sons of Alphaeus (Cleopas).

But why does the writer of this Epistle not speak of himself as "the brother of the Lord?" It has been asked. James does not do so in his Epistle either. He is silent about his relationship and so is his brother Jude. "The question, Why does not Jude mention his earthly relationship to the Lord? shows great ignorance of the true spirit of the writers of the New Testament. It would be the last thing I should expect, to find one of the brethren of the Lord asserting this relationship as a ground of reception for an Epistle. Almost all agree that the writer of the Epistle of James was the person known as the brother of the Lord. Yet there we have no designation. It would have been in fact altogether inconsistent with the true spirit of Christ (Luke 20:27-28), and in harmony with those later superstitious feelings with which the next and following generations regarded His earthly relatives. Had such a designation as "Adelphos tou Kyriou" (brother of the Lord) been found in the address of an Epistle, it would have formed a strong a priori objection to its authenticity" (Prolegomena).

Jude is therefore the one mentioned in Matthew 13:55. Apart from this Epistle we know nothing more of him. The date of the Epistle is about the year 65.

Its Authenticity

It is authenticated by different ancient sources. The Muratorian fragment mentions it as Jude's Epistle. Clement of Alexandria cites it as Scripture, as well as Tertullian and others. The theories of some objecting critics need not to be considered.

To whom the Epistle was originally addressed is not stated. Some have surmised that like James and the Petrine Epistles Jude addressed originally Jewish believers. This may be true, for Jude mentions, prominently, like Peter, Old Testament facts, besides some Jewish traditional matters, which thereby are confirmed as facts. Concerning the apocryphal writings, which especially the book of Enoch, which Jude is charged with having used in the composition of his Epistle, we shall have more to say in the annotations.

Jude and 2 Peter 2:1-22

As stated in the introduction to the Second Epistle of Peter, Jude's testimony is very much like the testimony of the Apostle Peter in the second chapter of his second Epistle. Hence there has been a long controversy whether Jude copied from Peter or Peter copied from Jude. We have stated before that if Jude had copied from Peter, his epistle could not be an inspired Epistle, and so if Peter copied from Jude. Jude may have known Peter's Epistle, but that does not mean that he used Peter's Epistle, but the Holy Spirit gives a similar testimony through Jude, which is, after a closer examination, somewhat different from Peter's epistle. This is pointed out in the annotations.

The Message of Jude

It seems about the time when Jude wrote his letter a departure from the faith set in among believers. This is confirmed by the fact that other epistles written about the same time give warnings of the same nature as those given by Jude. The message of Jude may be called a prophetic history of the apostasy of Christendom from its beginning in apostolic days down to the end of the age, when the complete apostasy will be dealt with and completely destroyed by the coming of the Lord. It is the darkest forecast of the end of the age which the Spirit of God has given in the Epistles. While apostasy and anti-christianity have held sway all through the history of Christendom, there is coming in the end of this age a consummation, the evils of which are pictured by the Holy Spirit through the pen of Jude. We know that we are living right in the midst of the fulfillment of Jude's message. The Epistle is, therefore, of great importance for our times.

Commentary – only chapter

I. THE INTRODUCTION

Verses 1-4. Contending for the faith

Verses 1-2. Salutation

Jude 1:1-2

Jude in his brief introduction speaks of the Christian believers, whom he addresses, as called ones, sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ. The latter statement may also be translated “kept for Jesus Christ.” What was true of the believers in Jude’s day is true of all believers. Especially comforting is the fact, that, no matter how dark the days may be, however strong the current of evil, those who are “the beloved of God called saints” will be preserved in Jesus Christ and kept for Him as the members of His body, till He comes. He keeps His own. It is the blessed assurance that the believer’s keeping rests in His own hands. In the Revelation we see in the glory vision that Christ holds seven stars in His right hand, which is the symbol of the hand of His power with which He keeps His own. Then there is the prayer that “mercy, and peace, and love may be multiplied.”

II. THE PURPOSE AND OCCASION OF THE EPISTLE

Verses 3-4. The occasion of the letter

Jude 1:3-4.

“Beloved, giving all diligence to write unto you of our common salvation, I was constrained to write unto you exhorting you to earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.”

It had evidently been upon the heart of Jude to write an epistle to the Christians whom he knew. He gave all diligence to carry out his intention. This must mean that he prayed and thought over this matter. He then decided to write about the common salvation. This is the gospel.

It is the nearest and the dearest object to every believer, for it is the matchless story of God’s love. It reveals the Son of God, our Lord, who died for our sins, who was buried and rose again the third day. There are blessed depths and heights in this gospel, the salvation which believers have in common, which have never yet been measured. Jude thought to make this the theme of his epistle. Then something happened. The power which was to guide his pen

constrained him to write about something else. The Holy Spirit constrained him to exhort Christians to contend earnestly for the faith once and for all delivered unto the saints. Here is a very fine illustration at the close of the New Testament of how the Word of God was given. Jude had a desire to write about the common salvation; but the Holy Spirit wanted him to write about something else and He constrained him to do so, not in his own words but in words given by God.

What faith is meant? Not a creed or confession of faith as formulated by a denomination, sect or party, but the faith, which has been delivered once for all unto the saints. It is the same faith concerning which our Lord asked the question, “Nevertheless when the Son of Man cometh, shall He find the faith on the earth?” (Luke 18:8) It is the faith revealed in the Word of God. The heart of that faith is the Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, and the apostles’ doctrine made known by the Holy Spirit; it is therefore the whole body of revealed truth. This faith is given by revelation, a different thing from what is being taught today, as if this faith were the product of a process of evolution through the religious experiences of the race for thousands of years. The truths which man needs cannot be found by searching. This faith is “once for all delivered unto the saints.” It is permanent, irrevocable and like Him who has revealed it, unchanging. Nor is this faith delivered to the world, but to the saints, that is to the body of Christ, the Church.

That faith was being corrupted when Jude received the commission to exhort Christians to contend earnestly for it. They were ungodly men, having taken on the Christian profession without possessing the reality of it. The evil they introduced was twofold. They turned the grace of God into lasciviousness and they denied the rights of Christ to be Lord and Master. They professed to believe in grace, but abused it so that they might indulge in their own lusts; they knew nothing of the power of godliness manifested in holy living and therefore they denied the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ.

III. EXAMPLES FROM THE PAST

Verses 5-7. Historical warnings of God’s judgment

Verse 5. The Israelites in the wilderness

Verse 6. The fallen angels

Verse 7. The sinners of Sodom and Gomorrah

Verses 8-16. False Teachers

Verse 8. Their presumption indicated

Verses 9-10. Their presumption illustrated

Jude 1:5-10.

The Spirit of God reminds them of certain apostasies in past history and how God in judgment dealt with it. If we compare this section of Jude's Epistle with 2 Peter 2:4-8 we shall see how both documents differ from each other. Peter speaks first of the angels that sinned; then of Noah and the flood and finally of Sodom and Gomorrha and the deliverance of Lot. Jude on the other hand does not mention Noah at all, nor Lot. He speaks first of the Israelites who had come out of Egypt and were destroyed in the wilderness because they believed not. This is followed by the angels who kept not their first estate; then comes Sodom and Gomorrha and the judgment which fell upon these cities, and finally Jude adds something which is not found elsewhere in the Word of God, the incident about Michael contending with the devil about the body of Moses. It is far fetched with this different testimony which Jude gives to charge him with having copied Peter, or Peter having used Jude.

When we examine these examples of the past, we discover that they are not chronologically arranged. If they were reported according to the time when they happened, Jude, like Peter, should have mentioned first the angels that sinned; after which Sodom and Gomorrha would be in order, followed by the Israelites who fell in the wilderness and after that Michael contending with the devil. Why this unchronological arrangement in this Epistle? There must be a purpose in it. We believe the arrangement is made in the manner as it is to teach us the starting point and the goal of apostasy. It starts with unbelief. The people had been saved out of Egypt, but they believed not and were destroyed in the wilderness, except those mentioned in the Word who believed.

Thus all apostasy starts with unbelief in what God has spoken. The angels which kept not their first estate, who left their own habitation, and who are now chained, are the same angels of whom Peter speaks, those who brought in the corruption described in the opening verses of Genesis 6:1-22. They gave up the place assigned to them. This is the next step in the progress of apostasy. Unbelief leads to rebellion against God. Sodom and Gomorrha come next. Here we find the grossest immoralities and going after strange flesh. These vicious things are still in the world, and why are they so prominent in our days? On account of unbelief. Then follows the statement, that these apostates are filthy dreamers who defile the flesh, despise dominion, and speak evil of dignities. This is lawlessness. This is the goal of all apostasy. The predicted lawlessness with which this age ends is the fruitage of infidelity. Such is the development of

apostasy. Unbelief, rebellion against God and his revealed truth, immorality and anarchy. These steps may be traced in our own times.

To show that Michael, the archangel, would not rail against the fallen angel-prince, now the devil, as these apostates despise dominions, the incident concerning Michael contending against the devil about the body of Moses is introduced. He durst not bring a railing accusation against the former Lucifer, the son of the morning, for Michael still recognized in him the once great and glorious creature. It is stated by some of the early church fathers that this episode was recorded in a Jewish apocryphal book "Assumption of Moses." This book is no longer in existence. Another Jewish tradition has it that Michael had been given the custody of the grave of Moses.

Jude does not quote from tradition, nor does he quote from a source now no longer available, or, as others surmise, used one of Zechariah's visions (chapter 3), but the Holy Spirit revealed unto him what actually took place when Moses had died. It seems that Michael the archangel was commissioned by the Lord to conduct the funeral of Moses (Deuteronomy 34:5-6). Then the devil appeared upon the scene claiming the body of the servant of the Lord, for what purpose is not revealed. (See annotations on Deuteronomy 25:1-19.) And Michael durst not bring against him a railing accusation but said, The Lord rebuke thee. But it is different with these apostates. They are compared with irrational animals, following their natural inclinations.

IV. A FURTHER DESCRIPTION OF THE APOSTATES

Verse 11. Reasons for their woe

Verses 12-13. Their spiritual sterility

Jude 1:11-13.

The Spirit of God pronounces a woe upon them. The eleventh verse is of much importance. At the close of the New Testament we are reminded of Cain, the first murderer of the human race. Some expositors claim that his name is introduced here because he is a representative of all bad men; others think that he is mentioned because these apostates hated those who are of the truth, as Cain hated Abel. The way of Cain was the way of unbelief. He did not believe what God had spoken, while Abel believed. He had not faith like Abel, who offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous. Cain was a religious man nevertheless, but his religion may be termed a "bloodless religion." He brought the labor of his hands, that which he had gathered from the land upon which the curse rested.

The apostates go in the same way of self-will and in that way they reject the record of God concerning His Son. They have no use for the blood of redemption; the salvation they preach is the salvation of “Do,” by character. They rush also greedily after the error of Balaam. Money is the chief object with them. They teach error for reward, knowing all along that their teaching is contrary to the revelation of God. Money, honor and glory from men, self exaltation and self gratification are the leading motives of these men. The third characteristic is the sin of Core (Korah). The sin of Korah was open rebellion and opposition against the authority of God and the priesthood He had instituted. These apostates of the last days manifest the same spirit of rebellion and defiance. They have no use for the Lord Jesus Christ as the appointed mediator, priest and advocate. The perdition of Korah will overtake them likewise.

Not Jude, but the Holy Spirit, denounces them in the strongest language. (See annotations 2 Peter 2:1-22.) They are doubly dead, first in their own fallen nature, and in the second place by turning their ears from the truth and going into apostasy. They are like trees which give the promise of fruit in an imposing bloom, but which withers away; they do not yield any fruit whatever. They are plucked up by the roots without any hope of a revival. They are like the wild waves of the sea, foaming out their own shame; wandering stars to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever. The wandering stars in the universe belonged once to some great solar system. They detached themselves and began their wanderings. As they left their center they wandered further and further away, deeper and deeper into the immense space of cold and darkness. So these apostates left the center and became eccentric rushing, like these wandering stars of the heavens, into the outer darkness.

V. THE TESTIMONY OF ENOCH

Verses 14-15. Their judgment predicted

Verse 16. Their character reviewed

Jude 1:14-16

The Holy Spirit introduces quite abruptly Enoch, the seventh from Adam. There is a deep spiritual significance in this. Enoch lived as an age was about to close. Before the evil days of Noah, with universal violence, corruption and wickedness, had come, Enoch walked with God and bore a prophetic testimony of what was to come in the future. He suffered on account of the testimony he bore to that generation. The ungodly spoke against him, but he kept on in his walk with God and in his testimony, till the day came when he was suddenly removed from the earth. “By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see

death; and was not found, because God had translated him, for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God” (Hebrews 11:5). Enoch represents prophetically the true Church living at the close of the age, bearing witness to the coming of the Lord, and waiting in faith for the promised translation. The Spirit of God mentions Enoch for this purpose and for our encouragement.

Much has been made by critics and rationalists about this reference to Enoch. What Jude writes about Enoch is found in a Jewish apocryphal book by the name of “The Book of Enoch.” The book consists of supposed revelations which were given to Enoch and to Moses. Its object seems to be a vindication of the ways of providence and to set forth the coming and terrible retribution for sinners. The book was known to the early church fathers who refer to it often in their writings. For centuries it seems to have been lost. About the close of the 18th Century an Ethiopian translation was discovered in Abyssinia and translated into English and German. Critics claim that this book of Enoch was used by Jude, inasmuch as he inserted this reference to Enoch, which is almost verbatim found in that book. But according to these critics the book of Enoch was written in the second century and from this they reason that Jude did not write this Epistle in the year 65 A.D.

But there are other scholars who have ascertained that the book of Enoch was in existence before Christ. Even if the critics were correct that this book was written in the second century of our era, it is no evidence that Jude could not have written his Epistle in the year as stated above. The writers of the book of Enoch might have used Jude’s statements about Enoch. The fact that Jude in giving by the Holy Spirit this paragraph concerning Enoch proves the record, whether it was handed down by tradition or written in the book of Enoch, to be true.

VI. THE EXHORTATIONS

Verses 17-25. Exhortations and closing benediction

Verses 17-23. Exhortations to God’s own

Verses 24-25. Closing benediction

Jude 1:17-23

These exhortations are for the people of God, whose lot is cast in these predicted evil days. The first exhortation is to remember the words which were spoken before of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ. To hold fast these words and remember them is the great need in the days of apostasy. Peter bears the same

witness (2 Peter 3:1-3). Building yourselves up on your most holy faith is the next exhortation. Nothing else is worth while building up for believers living in the last days. Prayer is needed. But it is not prayer for the Holy Spirit, for another Pentecost, which is nowhere promised, nor for another baptism with the Spirit, but it is prayer in the Spirit. The exhortation “Keep yourselves in the love of God” means to keep oneself in the consciousness in that fellowship with the Father and with the Son of which John speaks in his first epistle, that is enjoying the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life, which means, looking for Himself, for His coming. The final exhortations give instructions as to the believer’s attitude towards those who have been led away.

VII. THE CONCLUSION

Jude 1:24-25

“Now unto Him that is able to keep you from stumbling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, to the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen.”

Beautiful doxology with which this Epistle ends! His own are being kept in the evil days with which the age closes. They are the preserved in Jesus Christ kept for Him. And while we wait for Him, He is able to keep us not only from falling, but from stumbling. And then comes that day in which He will present His own, His beloved people, whom He bought by His own precious blood. He will present them faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy. And what a day of joy and gladness, as well as of glory, it will be, when He shall see the travail of His soul and will be Satisfied, the day in which He will present to Himself a glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blame! (Ephesians 5:27)

Questionnaire on Jude

1. What is the content of the ‘faith once delivered to the saints’? (cf. 1 Corinthians 15: 3; 1 Timothy 3:16).
2. Compare Jude and 2 Timothy 2. For guidance as to how to deal with false teachers.
3. The keeping power of Christ (cf. Romans 8: 38, 39).



The Dead Sea at dusk reminded his readers of the fate of the cities of the Plain, Sodom and Gomorrah

Home Churches and Ministry of All Believers

Christian ministry in all spheres necessitates sound theological foundation. For that reason, being the Executive Minister of the Berea Bible School of Theology and Ministries on Internet, I endeavour to articulate and synthesize the twenty-first century theology of ministry that provides framework in pursuing the mission of the Universal Church of Christ. The absoluteness of the biblical truths necessitates expressions consistently relevant to the context of the believing community. Consequently, sound theology determines the practice of the ministry that brings about transformational implications.

The twenty-first century theology of the ministry finds its fundamental origin in the biblical theology of the priesthood of all believers. The Bible both Old and New Testaments lend credence to the conceptual framework of tracing the historical identity and functions of God's chosen people. The identity and ministry function of God's people are fundamentally situated within the theological framework of the believers' priesthood.

Old Testament Foundation of the Theology of Ministry

In Exodus 19:5-6, the text states, “Now therefore, if you will obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my own possession among all peoples; for all the earth is mine, and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words, which you shall speak to the children of Israel (NIV).” Here, God makes a covenant with all the people of Israel. Apparently, based on this text, the people become “God's possession,” and are chosen for the privilege of service. The nature of the service was in direct connection with God's claim upon “all the earth.” Accordingly, Israel is called from among all the peoples to serve as a “kingdom of priests” and a “holy nation” on behalf of the kingdoms and nations of the world. God instituted the priesthood of Israel as a congregated unit for the purpose of service to the world. This is the vocation of the “people of God” of which each member stands under God's call, and each is accountable for his or her response to it.

Another major Old Testament passage that supports the concept of priesthood of the entire people of God is Isaiah 61:5-6 which states, “Aliens will shepherd your flocks; foreigners will work your fields and vineyards. And you will be called priests of the Lord, you will be named ministers of our God. You will feed on the wealth of the nations, and in their riches you will boast.” Here, the entire people of God, the Israelites, are called to be God's priests. As a nation, Israel is enlisted to be a kingdom of priests, that is, offering service to God.

The monarchical period, however, marks a shift in the concept of the Old Testament priesthood where a sharp distinction is made between the priestly caste and the common people. In this context, the king takes charge of everything, and, under his control, the priests become responsible for religious matters.

This era sees the rise of ritual practices and the organization of the cult that spread from the principal sanctuaries to others. As a result, the head of the families loses its ancient privilege to offer sacrifices. However, the passages mentioned above indicate that God's original intention was for the entire nation to be a kingdom of priests (Exodus, 19:5-6; Isaiah 61:6). God instituted the Levitical priesthood to represent for the entire nation in the matter of honour, privilege and obligation.

New Testament Foundation of the Theology of Ministry

Echoing the major Old Testament passages pointed out above, 1 Peter 2:9 states,

“But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.”

God’s people, as the text maintains is a “royal priesthood” with no marked distinction between leaders and community members. Furthermore, the text speaks of one unified body of believers in Christ.

Verses 4 and 5 of I Peter 2 provide the backdrop to the motif of a collective priesthood. Evidently, the text speaks of a spiritual community constituting the new Israel, the only effectual priesthood. Distinctly, the above text speaks of the risen Christ who serves as that “living stone.” Christ forms around himself “a spiritual house” that is composed of those who exercise faith “like living stones,” who become the new “priesthood.” On a similar comment, Paul speaks of the body of Christ as “God’s temple” where God’s Spirit dwells (I Cor. 3:16). In Paul’s logic, God’s “dwelling place” on earth is no longer conceived of as a building set apart from the world, but as a people, the laos, the entire body of believers. As a matter of fact, the New Testament knows nothing of a sacerdotal priestly class in contrast to the laity. God instructs his people, i.e., all believers, to offer spiritual sacrifices individually and collectively.

The New Testament believers constitute the succession to the priesthood in old Israel, having been given the right of direct access to God through Christ. Consequently, the Levitical priesthood found its fulfilment in the New Testament believers through Christ. Furthermore, the ministry in the church has replaced the ancient priesthood. Hence, all the believers in Christ are priests in the New Testament (Rom. 12:1; Phil. 2:17; 4:18; Heb. 13:15, 16; Rev. 1:5).

Theological Perspectives on “Clergy” and “Laity”

The terms laos and kleros deserve attention in relation to the study of the concept of the priesthood of believers. Etymologically, the Greek word laos means “a people for a possession,” that is, as pertaining to God. The term does not refer to “untrained” or “ordinary” people, but specifically applies to God’s entire people (Acts 15:14; Rom. 9:25; 1 Pet. 2:9). On the contrary, the Greek word laikos, meaning “layman,” does not appear in the Bible.

In the New Testament there is only one ministering people with leaders, who were also members of the laos. The leaders are distinguished through their willingness to serve. The exercise of spiritual gifts equips the people of God for the work of the ministry (Ephesians 4:11-12). Evidently, the traditional titles of honor ascribed in the Old Testament to Israel as the “people of God,” the laos now applies to the believing community in the New Testament without

reservation and without distinction. The transfer of such title from Israel to the New Testament believers is the fulfilment of the Old Testament prophecy. The whole system of the Old Testament priesthood was typical. It was a shadow of the New Testament body of Christ. The Old Testament priests all prefigured the great Priest who offered “one sacrifice for the sins of all” (Heb. 10:10-12). Consequently, there is no more Old Testament system of priesthood. The term priest is now applied to all believers, but the concept implies no sacerdotal functions.

The word “clergy” derives from the Greek *kleros*, which means “lot,” “portion” or “heritage” necessitates attention.” In 1 Peter 5:3, the word in the plural means the community allotted to each presbyter. This indicates that the term refers to a functional office, not a state of life. The so-called “clergy” were allotted a special portion of work from among the whole people of God. Hence, the term “clergy” is not a special status within the body of Christ.

The New Testament usage of the word *hierous* refers to the Old Testament office of “priest” (e.g., Heb. 10:11). It means a sacred or consecrated person who has been set apart for God’s service. The word *presbyteros* refers to the New Testament office of “elder” to whom the leadership is entrusted (e.g., 1 Pet. 5:1). In this regard, the church traces the Christian office of “priest” not to the temple priesthood (*hierateia*) of the Old Testament, but to the New Testament presbyteriate (*presbyterion*). Peter, in fact, claims himself as a “fellow elder,” not as a priest. The term *kleros* does not refer to any certain group of elite individuals within the church. All of God’s people are part of the “priesthood.” In a strict sense, the so-called “clergy” are members of *thelaos* whose ministry is directed to the believing community itself. The New Testament maintains a strong leadership. Such leadership, however, was without a class distinction between the clergy and laity. There exist differences on ministerial functions, e.g., apostle, prophets, evangelists, teachers among others (Rom. 12, 1 Cor. 12, Eph. 4). Nonetheless, the believers’ priesthood status individually and as a community remains.

The “Priesthood of All Believers” During the Reformation Era

During the Reformation era the concept of the priesthood of all believers became very contentious within the structures of the Institutional Church. The Reformation era provides a framework in tracing the concept of the priesthood of all believers. An elucidation on how Martin Luther and John Calvin formulated the doctrine of the priesthood of believers will be dealt with in the pages to follow.

Historical Factors Leading to the Rise of the Reformation

The rise of the Reformation era owes a great deal to the theological debates on the status and role of the lay people. Through the centuries, the Roman Catholic hierarchy and other religious groups make a sharp distinction between the laity and the clergy. Such distinction was foreign to the early church where the ultimate authority in ministry traces back to the risen Lord. Believers simply depend on and share in the same ministry. Early on, Clement of Rome (95 A.D.) would appear in historical records as the first person to establish a sharp distinction between the priests from the laity. This distinction contributes decisively to the establishment of the structural hierarchy in the priesthood. Along with the structural hierarchy is the sacrament of ordination. The church in Rome imposes the sacrament of ordination that results in the marked separation between the clergy and the laity, including the evident tyranny of the former over the later.

At the dawn of the Reformation era, the institutionalized church already would have two major distinguished bodies within the community of believers: the clergy and the laity. Records show that the authority of ministry and leadership reposes in the clergy. The status of lay people, both in principle and in practice, would not only subordinate to the priests, but also widens the gap between clergy and laity. The gap became synonymous with the sacred and the profane.

Richard Norton asserts that at the core of the historical context of the Reformation was the clergy. He points out that without the officially ordained clergy there was no church. With the establishment of the hierarchical cleric, there was the church in spite of their immorality, corruption and spiritual impoverishment. Hence, during the dawn of the Reformation the church existed even without the participation of the lay people. Consequently, the Reformation rose in reaction to such conditions of the institutionalized religion.

Given this historical context, two leading personalities who would champion the biblical teaching of the priesthood of all believers rose to prominence, namely, Martin Luther and John Calvin.

Martin Luther on the Priesthood of all Believers

Martin Luther's Formulation of the Concept

During the Reformation, like the endeavours toward it in the preceding Conciliar movements, Martin Luther tolled the bell that called forth new religious awakenings. Kreamer asserts that it was mainly a movement of the lay people. Martin Luther. During the Reformation, like the endeavours toward it in the preceding Conciliar movements, Martin Luther tolled the bell that called forth new religious awakenings. Kreamer asserts, that it was mainly a movement of

the lay people. Luther theologically departed from the institutional church with his concept that everyone who is baptized may maintain that he has been consecrated as priest. This principle epitomizes the concept of the priesthood of all believers. With Luther's theology of sola gratia, sola scriptura, and sola fides, the concept of the priesthood of all believers had been proclaimed as the great formal principle of the Reformation.

John Owen⁴ points out that the concept of the priesthood of all believers occurred to Luther after he was convinced that in and through Jesus Christ a believer possessed the righteousness of God.

James Atkinson⁵ also points out that for Luther, believers have immediate access to God without mediation of an arrogant Roman variety of priesthood.

Accordingly, all believers who are clothed in the perfect righteousness of God are welcomed in the presence of God.

Luther argues that the priesthood status of all believers in Christ was vitally connected with the teaching of the Scripture regarding free grace and salvation for all through faith. Luther emphasizes that believers have one baptism, alike; one gospel, one faith, and are all Christians. Such baptism, gospel and faith, alone make spiritual and Christian people. Evidently, for Luther, it is faith that makes men priests and faith that unites them to Christ. Likewise, it is faith that made believers the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, whereby they become filled with grace and heavenly power. Accordingly, Luther's emphasis on faith undermines the Roman variety of priesthood. Luther heightens his theological stance asserting that the works of priests and members of the religious orders are not in any way more sacred in God's sight than those of a farmer in his field or of a woman in her household duties. It becomes apparent therefore, that for Luther, whatever vocation a believer has is sacred in the same manner as the vocation of a clergy before God.

The Roman hierarchical priesthood, along with other abuses, denied lay people their full rights and responsibility to function as God's redeemed. By virtue of

⁴ **John Owen** (1616 – 24 August 1683) was an English Nonconformist church leader, theologian, and academic administrator at the University of Oxford. He was briefly a member of parliament for the University, sitting in the First Protectorate Parliament of 1654 to 1655.

⁵ James Atkinson, *Introduction to the History of Christianity* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1995), 367-71.

ordination, the Roman priests assumed the sole privilege of mediating believers to God and claimed as the sole dispenser of the grace of God.

On the contrary, Luther asserts that such ordination had been invented by the Church of Rome. For him, the ordination rite practiced for many ages was not to be condemned. He believed that ordination is simply a ceremony for choosing preachers in the church. Luther, however, emphasized that all Christians are priests. With Luther's assertion, Latourette adds that what is called by the church as priesthood is simply a ministry entrusted to those who exercise it. Moreover, the exercise of such ministry requires the consent of the body of believers.

Luther's principle of "justification of the sinner by faith," calling the sinner a saint and the sinner a saint if accepted by God, likewise, fundamentally contradicts the principle of hierarchical priesthood.

The principle of sinners' justification by faith in effect theoretically demolished the priestly power. Luther's sola fides was taken in the religious realm as the foundation of the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers and in a social-political realm as the foundation of the democratic principle of equality of every person.

One of the particular abuses Luther opposed was that service to God be undertaken as good work by which a person wished to obtain God's grace and salvation. In this way, the importance of faith in the institutional church was diminished. As a result, people wished to endow churches or to become a priest, monk or nun, instead of simply believing the gospel.

Wilhelm Pauck⁶ claims that Luther formulated the concept of the priesthood of all believers with a firm conviction that every believer is a priest, and all Christians are ministers and priests by virtue of their faith in the Word of God. This concept counters the emphasis on good works for the sake of forgiveness

⁶ **Wilhelm Pauck** was born in Laasphe, in Westphalia, Germany [today, Bad Laasphe], January 31, 1901, and died in Palo Alto, California, September 3, 1981. A German-American church historian and historical theologian in the field of Reformation studies, Pauck's fifty-year teaching career reached from the University of Chicago and Union Theological Seminary, to Vanderbilt and Stanford universities. His impact was extended through frequent lectures and visiting appointments in the U.S. and Europe. Pauck served as a bridge between the historical-critical study of Protestant theology at the University of Berlin and U.S. universities, seminaries, and divinity schools. Combining high critical acumen with a keen sense of the drama of human history, in his prime Pauck was considered the Dean of historical theology in the United States. In the course of his career he became associated with Reinhold Niebuhr and Paul Tillich as friend, colleague, and confidant.

and salvation. Furthermore, it was a direct assault to the distinction between the clergymen and lay people.

Luther's concept of priesthood means that every believer has the power of the keys to forgive sins, administer the sacraments and everything else a priest is capable of doing. For Luther, this means that a believer has all the spiritual powers which in Roman Catholicism, belonged only to the pope, bishops, priests, and monks.

Gordon Rupp writes the English translation of the German Brunotte's summary of Luther's formulation of the concept of the "priesthood of all believers." Rupp says,

1. Before God all Christians have the same standing, a priesthood in which we enter by baptism.
2. As a brother of Christ, each Christian is a priest and needs no mediator save Christ. He has access to the Word.
3. Each Christian is a priest and has an office of sacrifice, not a mass, but the dedication of himself to the praise and obedience of God, and to bear the cross.
4. Each Christian has the duty to hand on the Gospel that he has himself received.

Based on the above summary, Luther's concept of spiritual priesthood is evidently a status and vocation of every believer in Christ. This summary further highlights the theology of

Luther asserting that every believer in Christ by status is a priest. Cyril Eastwood's comment in this regard is worth noting. He points out that "unless our priesthood is actually regarded as a status and vocation its significance is lost." However, the concept of the "priesthood of all believers" for Luther did not mean, "I am my own Priest." Luther emphasized rather that in the community of saints, God has so tempered the body that the believers are all priests to each other. All the believers stand before God and intercede for one another, proclaim God's Word to one another and celebrate His presence among the believers in worship, praise and fellowship.

Luther's priesthood concept emphasized that the priestly ministry of a believer does not terminate upon the person. Priesthood status propels believers into the world in service and witness to "show forth the praises of Him who has called us out of darkness into His marvelous light" (I Pet. 2:9). John Calvin on the Priesthood of All Believers

John Calvin seldom used the precise term “priesthood of all believers,” but the same emphasis is seen in his doctrine of the ministry, in the idea of vocation, and in the necessity of offering spiritual sacrifices. It is evident however that for Calvin, the believers’ priesthood is one of the direct benefits of the death of Christ. He believed that through the death of Christ believers are made righteous, worthy of the calling to the ministry of priesthood.

In his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Calvin asserts that Christ now bears the office of priest. By the eternal law of reconciliation Jesus Christ renders the Father favourable to the believers, and admits believers into the most honourable alliance of priesthood. Calvin asserts that for believers, though in themselves polluted, in Christ being priests (Rev 1:6) offer themselves to God, and freely enter the heavenly sanctuary. In Christ, the sacrifices of prayer and praise which believers present are grateful and acceptable before him. For Calvin, all Christians are called “a royal priesthood,” because by Christ believers offer that sacrifice of praise. Calvin added that through Christ, believers participate in the office of sacrificing. He based this conception on 1 Pet. 2:9 and Heb. 13:15 wherein the apostle speaks of the fruit of one’s lips, giving thanks to his name. With this assertion, Calvin was denying the possibility of any expiatory sacrifice offered by any priesthood including that of the established church. It is evident therefore, that Calvin’s theological conception radically departed from the teachings of the institutional church on priesthood.

John Calvin emphasizes that Christ is the Mediator, and through Christ’s work believers offer sacrifices to the Father. For Calvin, Christ is the High Priest, who, having entered into the upper sanctuary, opens up an access for the believers. Furthermore, Christ is the altar on which believers lay gifts. Whatever believers do attempt, they may attempt in Christ for He “has made us kings and priests unto God and his Father” (Rev. 1:6). Calvin further emphasizes that every Christian is mandated to be a representative of Christ in His redemptive outreach to the world. Consequently, for Calvin, this mandate is not a prerogative on which believers can rest. It is a commission, which sends believers forth into the world to exercise a priestly ministry not only toward the Christian community, but also for others. Such priestly ministry is not exercised instead of Christ, but for the sake of Christ and at his behest.

The priesthood of all believers, as conceived by Calvin, was not only a spiritual privilege. It is also a moral obligation and a personal vocation for every believer. For Calvin, the whole church is a priesthood, not only the so-called ordained ministers. He points out that Peter’s words “Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people” (1 Peter 2:9), was given to the whole church. The Roman priesthood, however, teaches it had been said to them

alone, that they alone had been purchased by the blood of Christ, that they alone had been made by Christ kings and priests unto God. Calvin's ethical orientation for the lay people toward demonstrating the reality of their state of election has been a consequence of the "universal priesthood of the believers." He believed that in Christ's priestly role, believers are received by God in the office of priesthood. Calvin maintains the same view with other early Reformation leaders on basic theological teachings. These teachings include the superiority of faith over good works, the Bible as the basis of all Christian teachings, and the universal priesthood of all believers.

In summary, Calvin's concept of universal priesthood emphasizes that all believers are considered priests. This concept appears to be the reaction of Calvin toward the Roman Catholic Church that imposed various ranks of priests. Such hierarchy of priesthood separated the clergy from lay people. Calvin's theological conception emphasizes that the priesthood of all believers is not to be considered as some obscure bypath, but as a main road every believer frequently traveled. He regards the universal priesthood as being dependent upon the Priesthood of Christ. The ministry of priesthood is for the whole church. The concept of the universal priesthood is expressed in the worship, intercessions, witness, and service to the community.

Based on Calvin's formation, the priesthood of all believers emphasizes participation of the entire Christian community in Christ's ministry. To confess Christ's name to others is the believers' prophetic task. To pray for their salvation is the priestly task. To disciple people is the kingly task of the believers. Apparently, Calvin's concept of the universal priesthood of believers provides a theological foundation for the ministry. Furthermore, his formulation of the concept encourages ministerial involvement of every member of the body of Christ.

Theological Coherence of Luther and Calvin on the Priesthood of all Believers

For Calvin, the high priesthood of Christ is the point of reference for the universal priesthood of believers. It is through the priesthood of Christ that the believers are made priests. Thus, Calvin was specific. The believers' priesthood is dependent upon the priesthood of Christ.

Luther, on the other hand, traces the concept of the priesthood of all believers from the theology of free grace and salvation for all through faith. For Luther, believers have one baptism, one gospel, and one faith. Such baptism, gospel and faith, alone make believers priests. Thus, the priesthood of all believers was made possible because of free grace and salvation for all through faith.

Calvin and Luther both emphasized on the ministry of the clergy. They consider it as a “special ministry” like the one that the laity has, and rooted on free gifts that the Holy Spirit has given to all Christians. The emphasis is not that the laity is excluded of the privilege to preach or administer sacraments, but so that the church may fulfil them in an orderly way. Ministers were set aside to serve the Church, not as those who are above the congregation, but within the universal priesthood.

Calvin emphasizes the importance of the community in matters of religious faith and practice. He fully realizes that uncontrolled private judgment means subjectivism, eccentricity, anarchy, and chaos. Therefore, believers cannot trivialize universal priesthood by equating it with modern individualism or theological minimalism.

In like manner, Luther’s formulation of the concept includes the emphasis of the community of saints. For Luther, individual believers cannot be their own priests, but are priests to each other. Hence Luther’s concept of the priesthood of all believers does not terminate upon the individual person. The emphasis on the context of the community of saints is an essential element of the concept of the priesthood of believers as formulated by Luther and Calvin.

Cyril Eastwood⁷ comments that using the phrase “priesthood of believers” a synonymous with “private judgment” is most unfortunate and is certainly a misrepresentation. “Private judgment” is always controlled, checked, and corroborated by the corporate testimony of the congregation.[98] Grenz, on the other hand points that Luther’s conception highlights a personal experience with God.[99] This seems to contradict the above comment of Eastwood. Yet, Grenz also emphasizes that the individual identity consisted in each person functioning in, contributing to and deriving personal identity from the group.[100] Accordingly, the context of the Christian community from Luther and Calvin’s perspectives remains significant.

“The doctrine of the Priesthood of all Believers” underlies all the great and far-reaching religious movements of the last five hundred years. Apart from that doctrine it is impossible either to understand or appreciate the cause of the Reformation, the impetus of the Puritan Movement, or the widespread influence of the Evangelical Revival. Yet nowhere can the

⁷ Cyril Eastwood was minister of the Methodist Church at Harrogate, England. Before returning to circuit work in England, he served as a missionary in the Trichinopoly District of India from 1940-1948, and then served the Church of South India for three years. Dr. Eastwood was trained at Wesley College, Headingley, Leeds, England. He earned his BD at Serampore, India, and His PhD at London University.

student find a thorough examination of its meaning, for no such systematic statement exists. Here is an attempt to fill this gap.

An examination of Reformation Theology shows that this doctrine is the basis of three dominant concepts which Luther stressed--Faith, Word, and Congregation--and that Luther's seven "marks" of the true Church arise from it. A study of Calvin leads to the conclusion that the doctrine of vocation is the necessary counterpart of the Priesthood of all Believers, that election is always related to consecration, service, and mission; it is an election to priesthood. An investigation of Wesley shows that he took this doctrine seriously and provided opportunities for the People of God to exercise their priestly privileges in the service of the Word, of the Church, and of the World. From all this comes the inescapable conclusion that in Reformation Theology the spiritual priesthood of justified believers consists in their proclamation of God's justifying love to the world.

This book is an attempt to present a clear and constructive statement of a doctrine which lies at the very heart of Protestantism and is closely connected with three important issues in current theological discussion--the union of the Churches, the doctrine of vocation, and the liturgical revival.

Luther and Calvin were consistent in their theological formulations, that the community of believers is a priesthood. Such priesthood is fundamentally different from the Roman variety of hierarchical clericalism. The believers' priesthood is a status and a spiritual privilege. It is also a moral obligation and a personal vocation that every believer needs to fulfil. Based on Luther and Calvin's formulation of the concept, all Christians have the same status and calling. Every believer is incorporated into the priesthood by baptism. Believers have direct access to God and do not need mediators except Christ. Believers have an office of sacrifice expressed in self-dedication in obedience to Christ.

All believers, therefore, have equal privilege and responsibility as God's redeemed people. Such privilege and responsibility were previously thought of as exclusive property of the hierarchical priesthood. Such teachings were opposed by the major reformers. Hence, the theology and practice of the established religion during the Reformation encountered the most theologically formidable critiques in Luther and Calvin. The concept of the priesthood of all believers is a precious and irreducible part of the Reformation heritage. It is a call to ministry and service; it is a barometer of the quality of life for every believer in the Body of Christ and of the coherence of their witness in the world.

Stanley Grenz asserts that the Reformers did not invent the idea of the believers' priesthood. Their teaching arises from the New Testament. The Scripture spoke of all believers as priests (1 Pet. 2:5; Rev. 1:6; 5:10; 20:6), who may approach the throne of grace through Christ (Heb. 4:15-16; 10:19-20). The believers were to acknowledge no exclusive mediatory hierarchy among them (Matt. 23:8-12; Mark 10:42-44; 1 Tim. 2:5). Each believer has the privilege and responsibility to engage in priestly functions such as offering spiritual sacrifices to God (Heb. 13:15; Rom. 12:1; 1 Pet. 2:9), and interceding for others (1 Tim. 2:1-2; 2 Thess. 3:1; James 5:15).

The “Priesthood of All Believers” During the Modern Era

The priesthood of all believers in the modern era delves into the study of the theology within the context of ecclesiology and within the context of the broader Christian community. It is noted in the previous section that controversy existed in the Reformation era regarding the status and functions of the lay people. It may be significant to consider that in the modern era, churches showed more concern regarding the position of lay people. The lay people in history were marginalized institutionally. However, there appears to be an increasing recognition to their status and function in the modern era. The growing concern to recapture the status and function of the lay people is a positive development with regards to the concept of the priesthood of all believers. Furthermore, the development indicates that the institutional church who previously opposed the believers' priesthood now affirms the scriptural authenticity of the concept in the modern era. The context of ecclesiology and the context of the broader Christian community provide a framework in tracing the concept in the modern era.

The “Priesthood of All Believers” Within the Context of Ecclesiology

Modern scholars trace the concept of the “priesthood of all believers” within the context of ecclesiology. Howard Snyder for example is convinced that biblical theology is impossible without biblical ecclesiology. This indicates that the concept in the modern era is often articulated within a theological premise. Timothy George substantiates this assertion that priesthood of believers is really a part of the doctrine of the church.

As noted earlier, the church is a universal priesthood. The believers in Christ are priests, and all are ministers. The universal priesthood applies to those who, through repentance and faith, have been admitted into the covenant of grace and, consequently, have been made participants in the priestly ministry of their Mediator, Jesus Christ. The theology of the ministry as rooted in the priesthood of all believers is traceable to the following metaphors of the church often used

in the modern era: the people of God, the body of Christ, and the temple of the Holy Spirit. These metaphors express the identity and unity of the body of believers in Christ as priests.

The People of God

The church is the people of God. Hans Kung⁸ for instance, asserts that all believers, in fundamental equality, are the church and are members of the people of God. For Kung, the whole people is to be a priesthood, belonging to and sharing in Christ's dignity. Kung emphasizes that all people who believe in Christ from every nation now belong to the priestly people of God.

Membership of God's people goes beyond specific ethnic group. Believers in Christ from all over the world are called to belong to God. The church therefore as people of God, is an international fellowship comprised from "every tribe and language and peoples and nation" Rev. 5:9).

In the modern era theologians are concerned about the visible unity of the church. It is argued that membership in the church, the body of Christ, not membership of any denominational affiliation, constitutes the fundamental identity for the people of God. Belonging to the "people of God" does not depend on earning acceptance, but on receiving freely of the love of God. Snyder echoes a similar concept pointing that the church is essentially the community of God's people. An organization, biblical faith, program, or buildings are simply components of the church. Grimes considers these components as "settings" in which the modern functions of the church are seen. By faith in Christ, believers become the true people of God. "Once you were no people but now you are God's people" (1 Pet. 2:10). Consistent with the historical assertions, believers are seen as the people of God. Regardless of race, believers in Christ have become God's own people (2 Cor. 6:16-18; Rom. 9:6, 23-25).

The Body of Christ

The Church is the body of Christ. Christ is the head of the body; therefore, the church is subject unconditionally to Him. As the head Christ must be understood

⁸ **Hans Küng**; born 19 March 1928) is a Swiss Catholic priest, theologian, and author. Since 1995 he has been President of the Foundation for a Global Ethic (*Stiftung Weltethos*). He is notable for his rejection of the doctrine of papal infallibility. Although Küng is not officially allowed to teach Catholic theology, his priestly faculties have not been revoked. In 1979, he had to leave the Catholic faculty, but remained at the University of Tübingen as a professor of ecumenical theology, serving as an emeritus professor since 1996.

as the fountain of the believer's lives and the giver of strength to the body. Members of the body of Christ are important and have a part to play. Thus, every believer is important, not just a few especially distinguished members.

On the basis of fundamental equality, every member has equal dignity and functions. Through the knowledge and experience of Jesus, every believer became part of the body of Christ, the church. By virtue of Christ's priesthood, the church itself became a priesthood. The priesthood of Jesus Christ has been expanded to include the whole body of believers. Every believer in the church, all the people of God, belongs to the priestly order. Winston Pearce (Christian writer) asserts that anyone who has voluntarily believed in Christ is incorporated into Christ's body, into priesthood. Likewise, Stanley J. Grenz maintains that the ministry of priesthood is shared by all. As members of Christ's body, each one entered into a covenant relationship with the head, accepting the obligations and benefits.

Every believer has distinctive and irreplaceable functions in the totality of the body. This indicates a kind of collectivism which contests church imperialism. The church therefore, cannot be understood as being constituted by a few elite members. As members of the body of Christ, all are important. There are no first and second class parts in Christ's body.

Believers are united with Christ as the head of the body (Col. 2:18-19). As the body of Christ, believers are also interconnected to each other (1 Cor. 12:12). Moreover, every believer contributes to the others (Eph. 4:14-16; Gal. 6:2). Hence, the believers in Christ is a unified and universal entity whose membership defies qualifications such as race or nationality (Col. 3:11).[124]

Modern scholars employ several scripture texts emphasizing the church as the body of Christ. Such texts include 1 Cor. 12:13 referring to "the one body" and Eph. 2:16; 4:4, to "one body" specifically referred to as "the body of Christ." 1 Cor. 12:27 and Eph. 4:12 further strengthen the claim. Louis Berkhof even regards this metaphor as a complete definition of the church.

The Temple of the Spirit

The Church is the temple of the Holy Spirit. This metaphor emphasizes that the body of believers has become a temple of God because the Spirit of God indwells in them. As a temple of God, a believer is holy; he or she belongs to God. The people of God as a unified body is a spiritual house (1 Pet. 2:5; Eph. 2:22) and a dwelling of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 3:16; 6:9).

God is building a holy temple of universal dimensions as a dwelling place of the Holy Spirit. As a spiritual house, the church underscores the character of the people of God, a holy priesthood. Being the temple of the Holy Spirit, the believers are led, taught, and supported by the Holy Spirit directly without mediation.

The Holy Spirit has been given not just to a few, but to the whole priestly community. The whole people, filled by the Holy Spirit, is a priesthood. The Holy Spirit vivifies and quickens the temple through individual believers. Stanley J. Grenz⁹ concludes that the focal point of God's presence is no longer a special building, but a fellowship of His people. The church is indwelt by the Holy Spirit as individual believers and collectively as a body. The physical building is no longer perceived as the house of God, but the believers in Christ. The physical building, although important, is no longer called a "holy place," rather it is the believers in Christ who are called to be a holy people. God intends that his dwelling should be his people, rightly referred as the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 3:16). The three metaphors presented above emphasize a unified body of believers who belong to God, enjoying the same status, dignity, and responsibility as priests. Consequently, the metaphors delineate the concept of the believer's priesthood in the modern era. Furthermore, these metaphors describe the identity and unity of the believers in Christ without a hint of hierarchical distinction. Hence, in the modern era, the concept of the priesthood of all believers is asserted within the context of ecclesiology.

The "Priesthood of All Believers" within the Context of a Broader Christian Community

The concept of the priesthood of all believers is evident within the context of the broader Christian community. In locating the believers' priesthood within the context of the broader Christian community, the following categories are utilized, namely; unified identity, corporate responsibility, globalized applicability, ministerial practicability, and methodological diversity.

Unified Identity

⁹ Stanley J. Grenz (1950-2005) is a leading evangelical scholar. Based in Vancouver, Canada's Carey Theological College and Mars Hill Graduate School in Seattle WA, Dr. Grenz has written prolifically and lectured throughout the world.

As emphasized, the identity of the believers is described in Scripture as the “people of God,” and “royal priesthood.” This is a unified identity that refers to the entire believing community, indicating the absence of dichotomy from within the body.[133] The scriptural distinctiveness of believers as affirmed in history remains normative in the modern era.

The picture of the believers in Christ is not of two separate groups – the “professional clergy” and “ordinary laity,” but rather the whole people of God. The clergy-laity dichotomy was an undesirable development of church history. It marked a drift away from biblical faithfulness. The affirmation of the identity of the believers as priests is essential toward the modern conception of the Christian community. This is similar to the formulations of Luther and Calvin that the church is a company of believers who are priests called by God to minister in the world.

The emphasis is the unified identity of the broader Christian community. The importance of the individual believer largely anchored in the person’s role as a microcosm of the whole and as functioning element within the whole. With this assertion, the personal identity is derived from the group, the unified identity of the believers as priests.

Corporate Responsibility

God’s calling for the community of believers is always a corporate concept. It has an intensely personal element, but it is never isolated individualism. Every believer is expected to function as a faithful and responsible part of the community (Eph. 2:19f, Rom. 12:4). This speaks of a personal implication of God’s call to the entire people of God. Evidently, what is true of the entire people of God as a community is equally true to all its members. With this regard, the significance of the responsibility is reduced when the community diminishes the privileges of each member. In the same way, the effect of the privilege is hindered when the responsibility is not emphasized.

Christians in modern times are faced with a challenge to Normative Biblical Identity grapple with the truth regarding the priesthood of all God’s people. Each believer is a priest and thus, each one is called toward the ministry. The gifts of the Holy Spirit are given to the whole people of God as priests for the ministry.

The entire church is given the authority to baptize. Thus, every Christian has the power to baptize. Even the celebration of the Lord’s Supper is a charge given to the whole church. Every Christian is empowered to take an active role in serving the meal.

Lawrence Richards and Gilbert Martin argue that the lack of emphasis on the status and responsibility of every believer is a cause for failure of the church to reach the world with the gospel.

The modern era conceives that every believer is a minister, servant and priest of God. Every believer is called to ministry and all God's people needs to be equipped to minister.

The concept of the priesthood of believers in a modern era goes beyond the experience of personal privilege and freedom. It also means responsibility and servanthood.

Moltmann¹⁰ asserts that the community of the baptized is the people of those who have been called. All are called and commissioned for eternal life, the glory of the kingdom and messianic fellowship, charged to live in the messianic presence of this eschatological future and to bear witness to it. There are no distinctive divisions within the body of believers because God's call is not just for a few, but to all believers. All believers are gifted. This truth becomes especially clear when theologians inquire into the concept of the priesthood of all believers. The New Testament used the word "priest," but it does not connote any special priestly class. The same idea is affirmed by theologians like Moltmann and Erickson among others in the modern Era.

Glocalized Applicability

¹⁰ **Jürgen Moltmann** (born 8 April 1926) is a German Reformed theologian who is Professor Emeritus of Systematic Theology at the University of Tübingen. Moltmann is a major figure in modern theology and was the recipient of the 2000 University of Louisville and Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary Grawemeyer Award in Religion, and was also selected to deliver the prestigious Gifford Lectures in 1984–1985. He has made significant contributions to a number of areas of Christian theology, including systematic theology, eschatology, ecclesiology, political theology, Christology, pneumatology, and the theology of creation. Influenced heavily by Karl Barth's theology, Hegel's philosophy of history, and Ernst Bloch's philosophy of hope, Moltmann developed his own form of liberation theology predicated on the view that God suffers with humanity, while also promising humanity a better future through the hope of the Resurrection, which he has labelled a 'theology of hope'. Much of Moltmann's work has been to develop the implications of these ideas for various areas of theology. While much of Moltmann's early work was critiqued by some as being non-Trinitarian, during the latter stages of his career Moltmann has become known for developing a form of Social Trinitarianism. His two most famous works are *Theology of Hope* and *The Crucified God*. Moltmann also served as a mentor to Miroslav Volf.

The concept of the priesthood of all believers in the modern era emphasized globalized applicability.[151]Theologizing tasks in the modern era employs a globalized paradigm. Pannenberg for example asserts that in doing theology, each theologian should have in mind the global Christian community and do the task of theologizing within one's particular context. The theologian needs to caution oneself not to be caught in the particularity of that context, but to express what can claim universal truth. The concept of the priesthood of all believers then is a universal truth that can be applied within a certain locality. Consequently, within the various dimensions of God's creation every domain is an avenue for the application of the believers' priesthood. This means that believers do have positive contributions to culture where ever he or she is situated by God.

The concept of the priesthood of all believers in the modern era includes the idea that the people of God can engage legitimately in cultural works. Saucy refers to this as the universality of ministry that manifests the beauty and harmony of God's creation. Thus, the ministerial call of the people of God includes all good work in the world that glorifies God.

All aspects of life are proper spheres of sacred service. With this conception, the theoretical distinction between the "religious" and "secular" may be eliminated eventually. This may occur as believers in the modern era are more advocative of God's call by making use of their God-given capacity for the ministry in their own sphere of influence. The corporate and personal elements of God's call require each believer to reflect theologically in a certain locality but with a global perspective.

Every place where a believer is located is a place of ministry. This means that every activity of the people of God in the world, whether public or private, business or pleasure, labour or leisure, social or political, is a religious activity. Modern Christian movements acknowledge the concept of a ministry that calls every believer to the service of Christ not only in the local church but also in the marketplace and in the global context. The ministry of this community is rendered in the world. It is performed in the daily lives of its people, in their participation and involvement in the structures of a complex society, in their sacrificial obedience in "worldly affairs," in their mission to the world. This suggests that the involvement of the believers from the theological perspective goes beyond the four corners of the local church. As noted earlier, the concept is of universal value, but the application of the concept may be localized.

Ministerial Practicability

Roman Catholics maintain the hierarchical distinction between ordained and non-ordained as consistent to their theology of apostolic succession. They are opposed to the perception that sacramental ordination took place later in history, which could lead to the Protestant thesis that the idea of such ordination was simply cultural.

The concept of the sacramental ordination in the Roman church maintains the hierarchical distinction between the clergy and laity. Evangelicals are contesting the idea of sacramental ordination within the apostolic succession and separate order of priesthood whose titles suggest elitism. In the modern Era, the use of the titles such as “Reverend” or “Clergy” and like terms are still common. Such titles continue to allude to the traditional hierarchical distinction that finds traces even among modern evangelicals.

Jon Zens suggests that the use of these titles should be subjected to further theological inquiry, as they tend to reinforce unbiblical patterns. These titles may appear difficult to avoid because they have become culturally embedded. Nonetheless, adhering to Jon Zens’¹¹ suggestion, a conscious effort is needed. Continues adherence to such traditional titles to some extent inhibits believers from affirming their status as priests. Following the New Testament pattern, there is clear evidence that leaders take care of the body of believers. With this pattern, Christian leaders serve as catalysts in fulfilling God’s call to the ministry. This is in view of Christ’s model of leadership in taking the role of a servant, leading the laos to spiritual maturity and equipping members for ministry. God’s people in turn, are to equip others and the work continues until Christ comes.

Moltmann suggests that those who are in ministerial leadership must resist the tendency to professionalize ministry to an ever-greater extent and insists that the service of the people of God be shared by all. This suggestion is an affirmation that all believers are called to the ministry as members of one body having equal status and responsibility. The concept, therefore, carries the idea of ministerial practicability as leaders, and everyone affirms their calling and appropriates their giftedness.

¹¹ A Theological graduate out of the usual pastorate to the home church ministry.

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